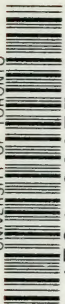


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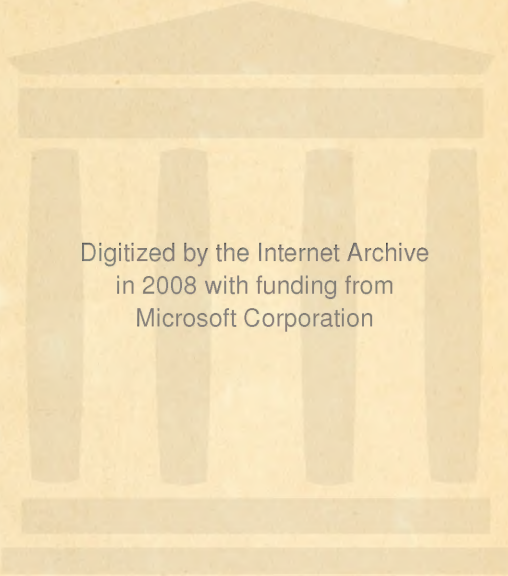


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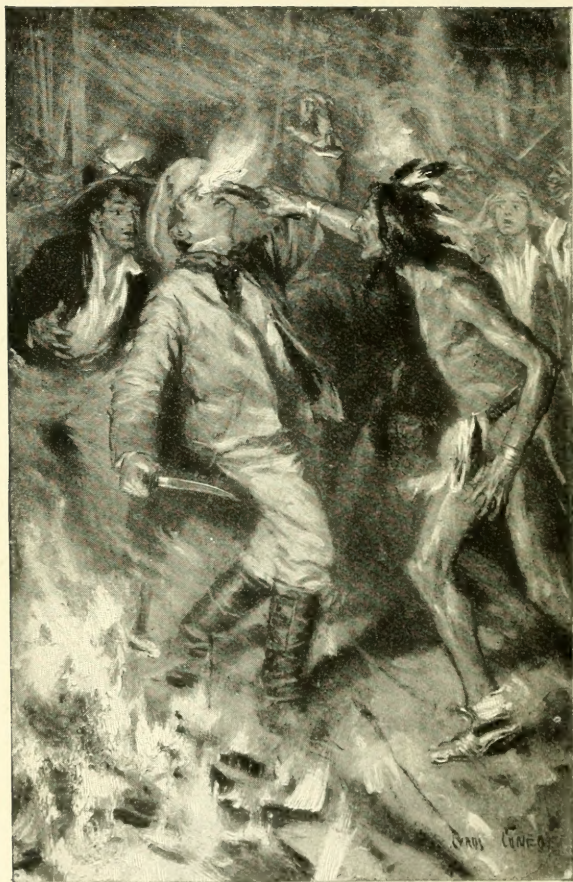


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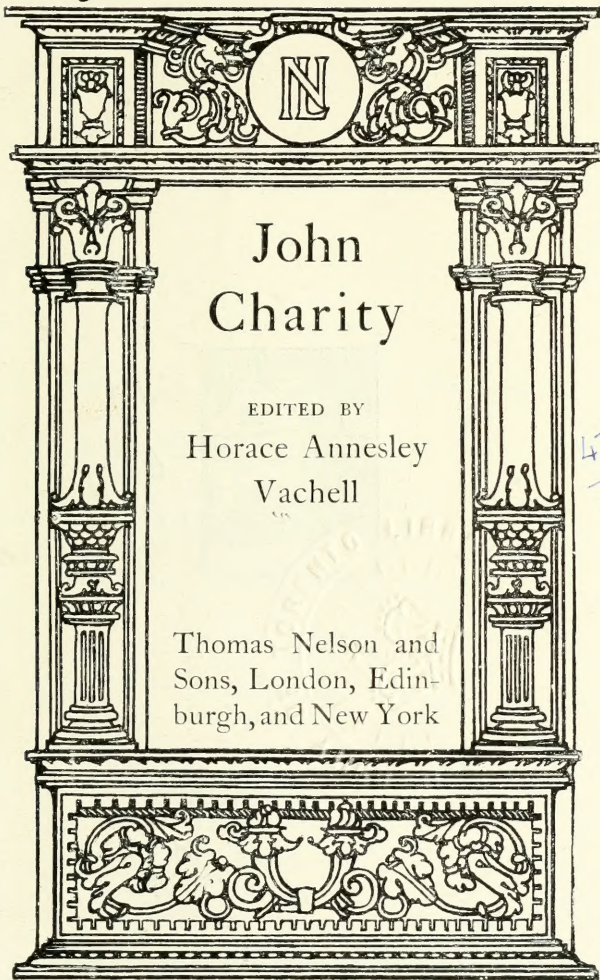


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"Suddenly I saw a flaming torch thrust into his face."

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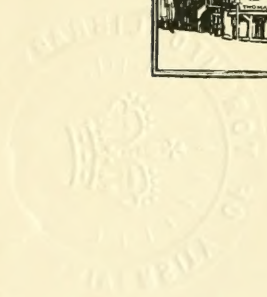
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TO MY FRIEND

DON CLODOMIRO SOBERANES,

THE NEPHEW AND KINSMAN OF ALVARADO AND
VALLEJO, IN GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGMENT
OF MANY KIND SERVICES,

I DEDICATE THIS BOOK.



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JOHN CHARITY.



CHAPTER I.

CRANBERRY-ORCAS.

IT was in the year 1837, when her Gracious Majesty Victoria ascended the throne of England, that I, John Charity, left England for Alta California. But before setting down the adventures that befell me, 'twere well, doubtless, to give the reader some brief information in regard to my birthplace, Cranberry-Orcas, in the County of Hampshire, my upbringing, and the causes that constrained a poor young man to leave his native land to seek beneath alien skies those gifts of the gods—fame and fortune.

The village of Cranberry-Orcas lies between Winchester and Southampton, upon the right bank of the silver Itchen, and a man may travel from John o' Groats to Land's End and nowhere find a prettier hamlet, nor one to which memory will cling more fondly. The parish (and others that need not be named) belonged to Sir Marmaduke Valence, Bart. (the baronetcy was of James I.), and when Henry VIII. dissolved the lesser monasteries the Abbey of Orcas and the fat pastures adjoining were granted by the

king to that gallant knight, Sir Wilfrid de Valence, whose full-length portrait by Holbein hangs to this day in the long gallery at the Court. All know that the abbey was destroyed by fire in Queen Anne's reign (when the present house was built), and nothing remains of the ancient monastery save a curious chamber with a groined roof, pronounced by archæologists to have been a crypt beneath the abbot's lodging.

The name Valence is written large in English history, and the family has had its fair proportion of saints and sinners, but, with the exception of Sir Marmaduke, those who were saints lived and died in the odour of sanctity, and the sinners remained sinners till Satan claimed them. Sir Marmaduke, however, combined in his own person, one of the comeliest in England, the qualities that go to the making of an Augustine. Unless the witness of thousands be disputed, he was the wildest, the most rake-helly of that wild, rake-helly crowd who, under the leadership of the first gentleman of Europe, ravaged society. He was justly notorious as a drunkard, a gambler, and a seducer of women. He could fight, crack jests, and make love like Albanley, and like Albanley he may have reflected in leisure moments that the God whom he flouted had touched him, perhaps, to finer issues than the hazard of the dice and the worship of Venus. At any rate, he suddenly repented him of his great wickedness, married the ugliest and most pious heiress in the kingdom—one can conceive no more dismal penance—bade farewell for ever to the town, and settled down at Cranberry-Orcas. In due season a son was born

of this marriage (that the wits maliciously held to be one of convenience), and if it be true that only the children of love take after the sire, then surely the jests of Sir Marmaduke's friends were seasoned with truth, for an uglier urchin was never seen. Then five years after, when a daughter was looked for, my foster-brother came to gladden the eyes of all women and most men. My mother has often assured me that a sweeter babe might be found in heaven, but not on earth, and assuredly not in the South of England, and my mother was a woman of ripe experience upon domestic matters.

Now it fell out that when Sir Marmaduke's dame was brought to bed of Courtenay Valence, my mother, Cicely Charity, was brought to bed of me, her first-born, and the lady of quality being unable to nurse her lusty boy, a yeoman's wife—there being none other in like condition in Cranberry-Orcas—was constrained, not without specious argument, to take to her bosom the lord of the manor's son, and to give him, as she gave me, share and share alike, not only a mother's milk, but a mother's love and tenderness.

"Charity never faileth," said Sir Marmaduke, who cracked few jests save those with a Biblical twang to them; and as a token of his favour and gratitude he stood sponsor to me, and gave me a silver-gilt tankard, and later much goodly counsel and more than one whipping. Indeed, I think he knew my back better than my face, for I never failed to turn tail and run whenever I saw his stately figure and stern, grim face approaching my father's house.

Before we were weaned, Courtenay's mother sickened

of the small-pox and died. The Court was quarantined, but my mother betook herself and nurslings to a brother's house at Alresford, and so we escaped the plague that raged terribly in the Itchen Valley and left many scars upon the hearts and faces of our neighbours. Sir Marmaduke's elder son, Austin Valence, caught the infection, and was like to die for many days, but the scourge spared him to become a scourge in turn to Courtenay and me, as will be shown hereafter.

Six months passed before my mother returned to Cranberry-Orcas, and Courtenay, being so well accustomed to the sight of her round rosy face, and missing, perhaps, me who shared his cradle, set up such a hulla-baloo at the sight of the new nurse who was sent to fetch him, and cried so lustily for nigh upon twenty-four hours, that Sir Marmaduke, spurred to action by an impending fit, ordered the infant to be returned forthwith to the Abbey Farm, to be left there, so to speak, till called for. He rode up the next day upon his sleek, round-barrelled cob, and my mother held up the child and prated, you may be sure, of its dimpled limbs and pretty tricks. But Sir Marmaduke never smiled, not even when the urchin crowed and chirruped, and he spoke, so my mother said, with a sneer upon his thin, clean-cut lips.

"The brat is well enough, madam, and I'm heartily grateful to you. My steward will see you, and——"

My mother smiled and interrupted him.

"I want nothing else, Sir Marmaduke. Your gratitude and the child's love—God bless him—are enough."

Sir Marmaduke frowned. Interruptions were not to his taste.

"I shall charge myself," he replied coldly, "with his foster-brother's education. Not a word, madam." And he rode slowly away, touching his hat with a lean forefinger after the fashion set by His Grace the Duke of Wellington.

My mother was not ill-pleased at this manifestation of gratitude. She had gentle blood in her veins, and set perhaps an extravagant value upon academical education. But my father, I learned later, was impatient of the baronet's favour, and minded to rid himself of what might prove a burden.

"Thou'rt a fool, Cicely," said he, when she advised him of what had passed, "a spoiled yeoman makes but a sorry scholar."

"John," retorted my mother, and I'll warrant her eyes were sparkling, "is the son of a man that followed the plough, but the grandson of a man who kept terms at Cambridge."

"Being a woman, thou'lt have thy way, Cicely, but it may lead thee and the boy into a quagmire. Learning, my lass, is a load that galls many a shoulder."

My mother confessed that she had the last word upon this occasion.

"Ignorance," she replied, "has done more damage than learning, Tom Charity. Samson slew the Philistines with the jaw-bone of an ass."

I doubt not my father laughed and chucked his wife under the chin, for he loved her tenderly, and was every whit as proud as she of the good blood that flowed in her veins. And I know that he loved my

foster-brother, and taught him many things that come not amiss even to the finest of fine gentlemen: Arcadian lore, sweet and simple as the song of a skylark. Courtenay spent the first four years of his life beneath the roof-tree of the Abbey Farm, and when he was breeched and taken to the big comfortless nurseries at the Court, I too was made welcome by the butler and housekeeper, because I was the playmate and foster-brother of the little lad they loved.

Yet, strange to say, and a wiser man than I must interpret the riddle, the boy whose bright face and mirthful laugh were an open sesame to all hearts found no favour in his father's sight, and, indeed, was but seldom in it. Sir Marmaduke, I take it, had loved many and much in his hot youth, and in a cold old age the fountain ran dry. I suspect, too, that he was jealous of my parents, too proud to enter the lists against them, too just, I give him his due, to impugn their influence. He had outlived his evil reputation, and was now universally respected and admired. The estate, once crippled with mortgages, was nursed by his untiring efforts into high health and prosperity. Not a roof leaked in Cranberry-Orcas, not a farm was suffered to fall into neglect, not a stomach nor a barn was empty upon the baronet's lands.

He made good his promise to my mother, and instructed the chaplain to spare neither Courtenay nor me. We could construe *Cæsar* and *Virgil* before we were ten years old, and had more than a smattering of French and Spanish. As I write my eyes rest upon a thin volume, bound in tree-calf, the gift of Sir Marmaduke, and on the fly-leaf thereof is my

name, and below it, in the baronet's courtly handwriting, *diligentiæ præmium in colendis literis præcipue in linguis hodiernis*. The elder boy had been sent to Eton, but Courtenay and I were placed upon the books of Winchester College, and entered that famous institution of learning in the year of grace 1827.

During our first holidays, I remember, we scraped acquaintance with a master mariner, a perfectly delightful man, salt as the sea he loved, full of anecdote, who distilled adventures by the bucketful, an ocean of reminiscence into which we plunged headlong. Both he and his house were strictly forbidden us, a fact that lent zest to our intercourse, and we learned from the baronet's austere lips that our friend was, or rather had been, a notorious smuggler, if not a *pirate*—how our hearts thumped at the word—and that the gallows, I quote Sir Marmaduke, had been robbed of a very dirty scoundrel.

Dirty he was not, unquestionably, nor, I think, a scoundrel, nor one who had wrought one-fourth of such evil as has been imputed to Sir Marmaduke Valence. That, however, is neither here nor there. To us the captain, as we called him, was blameless as the king. He had seen Nelson, had fought beneath his glorious flag, had cruised in the South Seas, had run blockades, and knew the ins and outs of the English Channel as we knew the pools and eddies of the Itchen.

One day the captain expressed surprise because we bashfully confessed that we had never explored the docks at Portsmouth and Southampton. "And I thought," he concluded mournfully, "that ye were

lads o' some spirit!" Now the captain had never taken the trouble to walk to Winchester, that ancient capital of England, whose cathedral is the boast and glory of the kingdom, and knowing this we might have returned a Roland for his Oliver, but we blushed sheepishly and held our peace. But, good Lord! how his words rankled, biting into our plastic minds like acid into a cork!

"Jack," whispered Courtenay to me, as we slipped home in the gloaming, "we'll go to Southampton tomorrow." And we did.

It was the first of many visits, a day to be marked with red. It chanced that a big ship was sailing for the Brazils, and we saw the passengers go aboard and listened breathlessly to the chatter of the stevedores. I can see the huge stern of that leviathan now, as plainly as if she were anchored on the lawn outside, and I can hear the hoarse cries of the sailors and the scream of the boatswain's whistle.

"Jack," said my foster-brother, "let's go aboard as stowaways and chance it."

More prudent counsels, my own, prevailed, but Courtenay would have sailed to the Brazils then and there had I consented to accompany him. Moreover, I burned to say yes. The thought of my mother's kind face, and that alone, quenched the ardours of temptation.

We told the captain, Mark Jaynes, what we had done and seen, and he was kind enough to approve our enterprise. He knew the Brazils well, he said, and began forthwith to spin a stiff yarn, to which we listened agape. The warp and woof of it were so

cunningly interwoven with diamonds, gold-dust, coffee, cocoa, rice, slaves, tobacco, and other stuffs dear to boys' hearts, that it served as a magical carpet, transporting us in a jiffy from the captain's parlour to the broad bosom of the Plata and the tropical forests of the Amazon. As we walked home Courtenay marvelled that the captain, after the enjoyment for so many years of the fulness of all desirable things, should be seemingly content with such meagre entertainment as his present life afforded—to wit, a small cottage upon the King's highway, an anker of Jamaica rum, his big pipe and the strong black tobacco wherewith he filled it.

“He can't stand our lubberly ways much longer,” said Master Courtenay, in an ecstasy of prophecy. “He'll go to sea again, Jack, and hark ye—we'll go with him.”

“He might not want us,” I replied doubtfully.

Courtenay at once suggested the propriety of bribing our seafaring friend, and accordingly we spent all our savings in the purchase of a splendid pipe that was duly presented to and accepted by Captain Jaynes. His mahogany-coloured face with its long thin nose, like the cut-water of a swift sailing sloop, was aglow with gratitude as he loaded solemnly the vast bowl.

“Lads,” said he, “when you want a friend, in fair or foul weather, pass the word for Mark Jaynes.”

We shook his hard hand in silence.

When we returned from school next Christmas the captain's cottage was empty, and we learned from one-legged Tom, the Cranberry-Orcas pikeman, himself an ancient mariner, that our friend, as Courtenay

prophesied, had wearied of inaction and found employment at his old trade. One-legged Tom winked a bloodshot left eye at the word trade, and left us to infer what we pleased.

"He's smuggling," said Courtenay, when we were again alone. "Don't I wish we were with him!"

The truth is he was none too happy at the Court.

Austin played the spy, and reported our doings and misdoings to the chaplain, who in duty bound told Sir Marmaduke. We were punished again and again till our hearts grew tough as our hides.

The baronet told my mother that he destined me for holy orders. Having fat livings in his gift he hinted at preferment, a hint that leaked from the fond mother's lips in kisses. Courtenay laughed and called me his reverence, till I cuffed his head, for I was the stronger, and bade him find me another name.

"*Pax, Pax,*" he cried. "Forgive me."

"You are sorer than I," was my answer, for my fist had fallen heavily. "There is nothing to forgive, but don't call me parson."

The years passed as we climbed the ladder of learning, and finally we crowed from the top rungs. Sir Marmaduke sent for us, one fine spring morning, and spoke of Oxford and a gentleman-commoner's gown for Courtenay. "The doctor tells me you are both fair scholars," said he, in his thin courtly phrases, "and both scapegraces. I would have you mend your ways."

"Jack and I wish to serve the King," said his son, disregarding the frown upon the cold face that looked down upon us.

"Serve the devil!" ejaculated the friend of the Prince Regent. "What hare-brained folly is this?"

"Buy us commissions, sir, in some regiment of the line. You have been a soldier." The baronet had held a commission in the Coldstream Guards. "There is no finer career. We would wear, sir, his Majesty's livery."

"You are like to wear motley," said Sir Marmaduke sternly. "Enough, sir, you will do as I please, as I command."

Courtenay shrugged his shoulders and bowed. The baronet's bow had been commended by Brummel, that of his son by a still finer judge, Count Alfred d'Orsay. For my part I stood stiff as a ramrod. Sir Marmaduke never vouchsafed me more than a passing nod, and upon formal occasions the largesse of two lean white fingers. Perhaps my attitude provoked him, for he turned suddenly.

"And what do you say, sirrah?"

"I am your honour's humble and obedient servant," I replied discreetly.

He laughed very softly, a purring laugh, the laugh of a fine gentleman who laughs at and not with his fellow-creatures.

"Very humble," he repeated, "and very obedient! Egad, sir, I have set you a-horseback, but you will ride where I direct."

"Jack will ride into the very gates of Hades if you so direct him," said my foster-brother, with his sweetest smile.

"His destination, I doubt not," replied Sir Marmaduke, tapping the snuff-box that a famous beauty had given him.

"I'll ride anywhere, your honour, except into the pulpit. I dare not preach what I cannot practise."

He measured me from head to heel with his contemptuous eyes, and I marked a smouldering cinder of dislike.

"You shall go to India," he said slowly, "and serve John Company. Courtenay will be consoled of your loss at Christ Church."

He waved his hand in token of dismissal, but Courtenay stood still, spell-bound by surprise and dismay. Looking back, I cannot doubt that the baronet wished to sever with one cruel stroke the link that bound me to his son. Why had he waited so long? I confess that his words stirred me to the heart's core. India! The very name whetted ambition. India, the nursery of Clive, of Warren Hastings, of the Iron Duke. Could I refuse such an offer as this?

Then Courtenay's eager voice fell upon the silence. I had never seen him so moved.

"You would part us, sir?"

The tears were in his eyes.

"Part you?" echoed Sir Marmaduke. "Are you flesh and blood, husband and wife, that you speak of parting with wet eyes? Ay, 'tis time for you to part. You've run riot together long enough. John Charity shall serve John Company—there's reason if not rhyme for you—a pleasing alliteration. You, Courtenay, must take your degree, and after that I have a friend's promise that a place shall be found for you in one of his Majesty's embassies. And now, leave me."

"You have made John an offer, he has not yet accepted it," said my foster-brother.

Then they looked at me, and my tongue seemed to swell and to stick in my mouth.

"If he refuse," said Sir Marmaduke drily, "he may expect nothing more at my hands."

"He will not refuse," exclaimed Courtenay. "Pardon me, Jack, I was selfish; you will go to India, of course; marry a begum, and return a nabob."

He spoke gaily enough with a smile upon his face, but I saw that his lip trembled.

"Sir Marmaduke," said I, "I'm truly grateful for what you have done already. I can never hope to cancel the debt I owe you and yours, but most respectfully I beg to decline your generous offer."

"So be it," he replied grimly, and turning his back upon us he walked slowly away. Courtenay and I escaped from the long gallery—the temple of injustice where we had been flogged many a time—and beat a silent retreat into the park that sloped to the Itchen.

"What will you do, Jack?" said Courtenay, pale and anxious. "Damme, I've put a rope round your neck. I could hang myself for a selfish ass."

I bade him pluck up his spirits. Already I had matured a plan that now must be promptly executed. My tutor had encouraged me to believe that a scholarship at Oxford was well within my grasp if I chose to exert myself.

"A scholarship first, and a fellowship to follow," said Courtenay, in high good humour. "And Jack, my purse, remember, is yours."

I laughed and pressed his hand.

To cut short a tedious business, I will sum up in a sentence the labours of many months. I obtained a scholarship, tenable for five years, of the value of £80 per annum, at the College of St. Mary of Winchester, commonly called New College, founded by William of Wykeham and affiliated with our own college of Winchester. My father promised me £40 a year, and my dear mother pressed into my hand a stocking full of guineas, the savings of twenty years, a gift I refused to accept. Courtenay and I went up to Oxford on the same coach, at Michaelmas Term, which begins on the 10th of October, but he was set down, a gentleman-commoner, at Christ Church, while I, a poor scholar, descended at the gates of New.

CHAPTER II.

MORE ENTERTAINING BECAUSE IT EMBRACES A
PRETTY WOMAN.

I HAVE written as yet but little of my own family, and nothing of that member of it who is justly entitled to honourable mention, and a chapter to herself—my cousin, Lettice Charity. She came to live with us, the pretty orphan, when I was some ten years old, and grew to be the loveliest maiden in the Itchen Valley. My mother tended her as if she had been a sensitive plant of some rare and exotic species, but the reader may take my word that the

girl was but wholesome flesh and blood, though fashioned more daintily than many a dame of quality. We had returned from Oxford to spend the Christmas vacation at Cranberry-Orcas, and Courtenay had not clapped eyes on Lettice for more than two years. My mother, who regarded Letty as a daughter, and whose ambition fed by her gentility was centred upon her two children, had placed the maid in a very select seminary—the honest word school was not genteel enough—a seminary, therefore, situate in the suburbs of Southampton, and presided over by a gentlewoman as prim and austere as the famous Miss Pinkerton of the Mall, Chiswick.

Mindful, doubtless, of this lady's precepts, my cousin, on greeting Courtenay, who had been accustomed to salute her as I did, with a hearty kiss, drew back bashfully from his extended arms, and dropped him the demurest curtsy in the world.

"Why, Letty!" exclaimed my mother, with ill-advised reproach, "what means this coquetry?"

Then, with many blushes, Lettice surrendered her sweet lips, and Courtenay took full possession. Time had been more than kind to both of them; a prettier pair never kissed and sighed and yearned to kiss again. My foster-brother was just turned two-and-twenty. He was tall and slender, admirably formed, with wavy auburn locks crowning a fair white forehead, beneath which lurked the bluest and most mischievous eyes. Lady Blessington has recorded that he closely resembled Lord Byron, and the likeness was more than accidental, for Sir Marmaduke's mother was a Gordon, and of kin to the author of "Childe Harold."

"I've not kissed her for two years," said Courtenay, as though want were a synonym of excess. He had the grace to blush, however, and my mother blushed also and blinked confusedly, while Letty's cheeks were as scarlet as her lips, and her bosom heaved beneath her kerchief. A kiss, such as I have feebly described, is no ha'penny matter.

That night Cupid mixed metaphors on Courtenay's tongue.

"You marked her confusion?" he said, and I nodded gloomily. "Why, man, she is a link between the seen and the unseen, between heaven and earth, yet of the earth, the Lord be praised! A lily of the vale, planted by God's hand, to be plucked and cherished by the hand of man. The elements were her sponsors. Flame has touched her hair."

"And her heart," said I, more gloomily, but he marked me not.

"Water from Choaspes," continued the infatuated youth, "is no more limpid than her eyes, and Naples' Bay no bluer. The air has set her curls a-fluttering. And earth, the clay of Phidias, the marble of Carrara, has weighted her limbs, else, Jack, she would float from us and depart."

"She had better depart," said I sulkily, "before worse mischief befall her."

"Mischief!" he repeated fiercely, gripping my arm; "what the deuce d'ye mean? Has any one dared to——" and he paused, his voice trembling.

My heart ached for him, for her also, and the part that I was constrained to play was not to my liking.

"Courtenay," said I, "you love Lettice?"

"By God, I do!" he replied gravely; "I always loved her, Jack, the sweet fair creature, but I never knew it till to-day—and, Jack—she loves me. There has been no speech between us, but between true lovers there is no need of speech."

"Courtenay," said I, "this is midsummer madness. The falcon mates not with the dove. If you are a man, if you honour your gentle breeding, if the affection you bear me is worth a pinch of snuff, this love you speak of must be fought and overcome. Come now, be sensible. You are absolutely dependent upon your father's favour. You cannot as yet support yourself, let alone a wife, and the babies that follow. Lettice has nothing but her face and her virtue; pursue this mad quest, and you will injure both."

"Not even from you, Jack, will I suffer such words."

I gripped his shoulder and continued: "You are but just of age, and Lettice has not left school. Pass me your word, *now*, that this unhappy business shall be pushed no further."

"And if I refuse?" he asked hotly.

"I must speak to my father, and to Sir Marmaduke."

"You! A false friend!"

I met his angry glance and tightened my grip.

"Am I a false friend, Courtenay, or is it you who misinterpret friendship?"

His eyes fell, and, releasing his shoulder, I held out my hand.

"Your word of honour, Courtenay."

He placed his hand in mine, very reluctantly, and sighed.

"I pledge you my word," he said slowly, "that I will respect the love I bear Letty—and you. I will keep away from the Abbey Farm for the space of one year—no more. Then I shall beseech her to become my wife. You may trust me, Jack."

"Ay," I replied curtly; and that was all.

He spent that Christmas with a kinsman in the county of Dorset, and none suspected the cause of his absence. But Letty pined for him, losing colour and appetite. Watching her as she sewed by the fireside in the oak-panelled parlour, I could mark the change in the girl, and my mother marked it also.

"Do you know what ails the little lass?" she asked one bitter morning in January, when the snow was knee-deep outside, and the icicles hung a foot long from the eaves.

"'Tis the cruel cold," said I evasively.

"I have heard her weeping in her chamber," continued my mother softly, laying down her knitting and gazing anxiously into my face. "And I think, John, that, as you say, 'tis the cruel cold and naught else that afflicts her. Now"—her voice changed all of a moment, and I was amazed at the passion in her tone—"how could he come here, and kiss her, and hold her to his heart, and devour her with his eyes, and then depart without a word? How could he do it? 'Twas not like him." Then her voice broke, and she murmured tenderly: "She is frost-bitten, sweet flower, frost-bitten."

Her distress moved me profoundly, and then—fool that I was—I blurted out the truth. My mother listened, a blush coming and going upon her smooth

cheeks, and in her eyes a suffused light, a glamour spread by pride and pleasure. "Dear lad," she whispered, "dear lad, shall I live to call him nephew?"

"We may live to call him scoundrel, mother. We love him, both of us, but — remember — he is Sir Marmaduke's son."

In my witless anxiety to keep these young creatures apart, I could have chosen no surer way to bring them together than by aspersing Courtenay's character. My mother rounded on me with so pretty a display of temper that within five minutes I was braving the cold without in preference to the warmth, nay, the scorching heat, within. My ears were tingling as I clapped hat to head and strode into the blizzard. When I returned to the midday meal, my mother kissed me with a demure smile, and Lettice, who sat in the chair from which a scolding had driven me, turned aside a blushing cheek. This Delilah of a mother had betrayed me! The maid's confusion was the sweetest thing to witness—and the most exasperating. At dinner, as luck would have it, my father said that he had had news from the Vale of Blackmoor, from his cousin-german, a famous breeder of cattle. In the tail of the letter was mention of Courtenay. During the mild weather that preceded the frost he had been seen cutting down the boldest riders in the Vale Hunt.

"The day will come," said my father, who loved to follow the hounds, "when Master Courtenay will see, mayhap, a wife and children on t'other side o' the fences. 'Tis so with me, I know."

Letty's cheek was pale, but her blue eyes sparkled.

"'Tis a gallant youth," continued my father, "and

a reckless. A breaker of horses, and a breaker of bottles, and a breaker of hearts, I'll warrant!"

My good mother sniffed, and for the second time that day took up the cudgels.

"Thy warranty, Tom Charity, hath been called in question more than once, I mind me. This young gentleman's finger is worth the bones and body of a man I know who rides fifteen stone and more."

And then a laugh broke from pretty Lettice, and I could see that for her the sun was shining and all was well. Later, my mother tore to tatters my reproaches, and banished my frowns with kisses. Lettice, she said, only needed the assurance that the friend of her childhood was not indifferent to her. The child was a modest maid, and thought nothing of love and marriage; and so on and so forth—a madrigal of nonsense. I take credit to myself, because I remained profoundly convinced that the affair was serious and should be nipped i' the bud. How serious it proved the reader will soon be able to judge for himself.

During this vacation Sir Marmaduke's heir, Austin, spared no pains to make himself agreeable to me, a tenant's son. Austin was now five-and-twenty and a very fine gentleman if there be truth in the saying that fine feathers make fine birds. His coats were cut by Stultz, and Hoby was his bootmaker. You can picture to yourself a *petit maitre*, undersized, pock-marked, with a long, lean face, and sharp eyes set too close together beneath bushy brows. He had studied the arts that please, and could turn a phrase as neatly as his father—which is high praise. He was, indeed, Sir Marmaduke's understudy, aping his walk, his

gestures, and his conversation. The baronet was a personal friend of Lord Melbourne, and Austin was already a member of Parliament. We have been told that the Prime Minister either was or tried to be a mere loungeur—one who played with feathers and dandled sofa cushions when important issues were at stake; and Austin, when Sir Marmaduke's back was turned, affected the same indifference to all matters of moment, assuming (when with me) a lively interest in the nice adjustment of a cravat, and shrugging his shoulders at the mere mention of social and political reforms.

For a season his civility perplexed me. He would stroll across the park to the Abbey Farm and drink a dish of tea with my mother, besprinkling her with compliments soft as April showers. These falling on generous soil bred weeds, pride, vanity, and the like that choked reason, instinct, and a fair sense of proportion.

“A kind heart,” said my mother, “is better than a handsome face. Mr. Austin has been misjudged in this house.”

“He talks sweetly of his brother Courtenay,” sighed Letty.

I pricked up my ears at this.

“And he admires our little lass. He told me yesterday that he has seen at Almack's none to match her.”

“He cannot be a judge of beauty,” said I angrily, “because I've seen him studying his own face in the mirror as if he were Narcissus' self.”

And this speech begat a homily from my mother and a frown on the face of Lettice.

Being in my salad days I never suspected that these visits were paid to Letty, and to her alone; but love, who may be blind, but is surely not deaf, roused a very tempest of jealousy and wrath in the breast of Courtenay, when the tale of this wooing by proxy—for Austin paid court to my mother—came to the ears of that impassioned youth. Lettice had returned to school when we met at Oxford, but my foster-brother assailed me bitterly, and for three days cut my acquaintance. Then his wits, for he was no fool, pricked his conscience, and he apologised humbly and entreated my pardon.

“I am not afraid of Austin,” said he, smiling.

“I am,” I retorted. “He’s a hypocrite and a scandal-monger.”

“Jack, I wish you had dusted his jacket for him.”

“For what, Master Shallow? For his courtesy to my mother?”

“On general principles,” replied the youth. “We thrashed him once, you and I, Jack. I shall never forget that day;” and he laughed heartily.

“Nor will he, Courtenay. His debt to us has been compounding interest ever since.”

The months passed quickly, for I was making a business of work, and Master Courtenay of play. At this time he was one of the most popular men in the University, hail-fellow with all, saving the proctors and his dean. We met daily at the fencing school, but at other times our paths lay apart, and the company that he kept was too fine for a poor scholar. He would urge me again and again to share his purse and his pleasures; I declined both and stuck to my humanities.

My life at New College was drab-coloured, but the red came into it soon enough, and plenty of it.

The long vacation I spent in France and Spain with a sprig of nobility, who paid me handsomely for my services as coach and bear-leader. Courtenay was absent from Cranberry-Orcas. Lettice was left to bloom alone. I wrote many letters to my foster-brother during my tour abroad, and some he answered, but of Letty not a word was said till we met at the Court upon the eve of his twenty-third birthday. If I had hoped that fashionable dames would surely put to flight his passion for a yeoman's daughter I was soon undeceived. I dined that evening at the baronet's table and Austin was present, a-glitter with trinkets and perfumed like Ruffius. Toasts were drunk in those days, though the fashion even then was on the wane, and Sir Marmaduke took wine with me, and gravely wished me a double-first. I think he was not ashamed of his godson, and doubtless surmised that the intimacy that had existed between Courtenay and myself was at an end. I confess that I thought so also, knowing well that porcelain and common crockery do not lie upon the same shelf.

"Tell us of your adventures, O Ulysses," said Courtenay. "What of the señoras and señoritas—hey? Mark his sober face, Austin. I'll wager that his heart lies snug beneath that snuff-coloured coat; no woman has touched it."

"Speaking of señoritas," said Austin, "I'll swear you saw no woman so fair as Lettice Charity in your travels."

He looked as he spoke at Courtenay, and the pock-

marks in his face seemed to deepen as if filled with bile and malice. My foster-brother blushed outright, as Austin added, "You agree with me, Courtenay?"

"Upon dev'lish few subjects, Austin, but on that—yes."

Sir Marmaduke held his glass of Madeira to the light of a wax candle.

"We will drink to all fair women," said he gravely, and the toast was drunk standing.

Upon the next day we shot partridges, and the largest coveys were found upon the Abbey Farm. My father rode into the turnips, touched his hat to the lord of the manor, and respectfully invited the party to eat luncheon at his house; an annual invitation, formally made and as formally accepted. The meal was always served in our panelled parlour, for the dining-room adjoined the big kitchen, and was not deemed fit for the entertainment of fine company. The stout oak table was brought in, covered with my mother's finest damask and brightest silver, and then piled high with substantial viands, a mighty boar's head, a game-pie (my mother's pies were famous), a larded capon, and in pleasant contrast the lightest confections, trifles, tartlets, and the like, with many liquors and cordials, including a bowl of cold punch compounded from the recipe given to Sir Marmaduke by no less a person than the Prince Regent. After this meal but few partridges were shot.

My mother, I remember, wore her best dress, a "Paduasoy," and Letty was bravely attired in an Indian muslin, that looked, so Courtenay said, as if it had been flounced and frilled by fairy fingers. I

think the rogue knew that she had made the gown herself. She sat between him and Austin, opposite me, and I could see the knot of ribbon at her bosom rising and falling, even as the colour ebbed and flowed in her cheeks. Her vivacity enchanted the young men, but it alarmed Sir Marmaduke, for more than once I marked a frown upon his high, white forehead, and he answered absently some of my mother's questions, and ate but sparingly of the game-pie. My own appetite, one of the heartiest in the world, failed me as I tried to interpret these signals of displeasure. When the women withdrew, and the cordials circled, Sir Marmaduke's cold face relaxed, and our tongues began to wag freely. Courtenay punished the famous brew of punch, and raved indiscreetly of the white hands that served it. He assured my father that his niece was a beauty, toasted her again and again, and audaciously appealed to Sir Marmaduke to confirm and crown a youth's opinion.

"You, sir," said he, "are a judge of wine and women. Have you seen a fairer creature?"

"She is very fair," said Sir Marmaduke; "*too fair*," he added, with emphasis.

"Ay," my father assented, "'tis a dangerous gift, but the little lass is good, and honest, and sensible. She hath heard more flattery to-day, I'll warrant, than is seemly, but 'twill not turn her head."

"Humph!" said the baronet sourly; "I trust not."

Austin, however, looked sourer than Sir Marmaduke. What foul scheme was bubbling in his head as he sat at my father's board I never suspected then; later it was revealed to me. But he must have realised upon

this particular occasion that the woman he desired—for I will not pollute the word love by mentioning it in connection with Austin Valence—was beloved by his handsome brother, and he guessed, doubtless, that this rival's passion had kindled responsive flames. I do know that he sought the baronet that same afternoon, and laid information against Courtenay, for Sir Marmaduke sent for me.

“You have spoken,” said he, “more than once of the debt you owe me. That debt you are now able to cancel. Tell me frankly, does Courtenay love your cousin?”

We were sitting in the library at the Court, and I can still recall the faint, musty smell of the leather volumes, and see the long rows and rows of books to which, as a scholar, I had free access. The room was eloquent of age and decay, for here were no new books in gay binding, no papers and magazines to prattle of the present, no flowers, no portraits even of youth and beauty. Nothing but hoary folios, quartos, and octavos, clad alike in soberest livery, servants all of them, ancient retainers—so to speak—set apart from use or abuse, rotting at ease in silence and seclusion. Not a living soul save I disturbed their peace, and Sir Marmaduke rarely entered the room. Perhaps he chose it for that very reason as the most fitting place for an interview that could not fail to be unpleasant. Moreover, my old friends on the shelves would certainly prick my sense of obligation to the man who had made me first acquainted with them. And who could urge the claims of love and the joys of to-morrow in a sanctuary of mouldering yesterdays?

As I paused in confusion, Sir Marmaduke laughed.

"You need not answer, John," said he, "for your honest face has betrayed you. Had you studied men as faithfully as you have studied books, my task had been more difficult. So he loves pretty Lettice, and she, of course, loves him? Ha! you cannot deny it, and you have the grace to blush for both of them. And Courtenay's intentions are, doubtless, honourable?"

I have used a note of interrogation, but the inflection in his voice was rather exclamatory, and contemptuously so.

"I could answer——" I began hotly.

"You need not answer, John. Your tongue is of little service to you or to me. I can read your face."

He must have read there dislike of a patron who had pinched patronage into tyranny.

"If you have no love for me," he continued, "you have an extravagant affection for Courtenay. I doubt whether man or woman is worthy of the sacrifice you made when you refused the sword I offered you and took instead a quill. That, however, is your own affair. I have sent for you; first, to satisfy myself in regard to the facts—which I have done; and secondly, to send a message through you to Courtenay and Lettice. I"—he paused and took a pinch of snuff, and I saw that the white fingers that encircled the box were as impassive and seemingly as lifeless as marble—"I need not recite to you, nor to Courtenay, my reasons—but they are essentially reasonable—my reasons, I say, for employing you as go-between. You will tell these foolish young persons that a marriage between them

will sever the tie between Courtenay and me. His allowance of a thousand a year will be forfeited. His name will be wiped from my will. This is my message—that I beg you deliver at your earliest convenience. A personal appeal from Courtenay would annoy me excessively, and might provoke, you understand, a scene.”

Then he rose—a stately and impressive figure—and bowed. The interview was at an end.

The butler informed me that Courtenay was not in the house; nor could I find him in the stables or gardens, but I met Austin, who said, with a sneer, that I should hunt my quarry nearer home. Then I suddenly remembered that this was his birthday, that his promise to me, concerning Lettice, had already expired, that, perhaps, at this moment, he was with her—a plighted lover. I unconsciously mended my pace and strode briskly along till I came to our orchard that slopes south-westerly to the lichen. And here I found my suspicions verified, and two blushing fools, and a love story that made my heart ache with pity and sealed for the moment my lips, for I felt like a serpent in Eden bearing in my mouth a deadly poison.

They stood before me with arms interlaced, the light filtering through the apple trees and falling on their faces.

“Well,” said Courtenay, and he laughed gaily; “we have told you our story. Now, what have you to say to us?”

CHAPTER III.

WESTWARD HO!

THE reader will doubtless have guessed that the tap-root of my distress and of my objections to this match lay deep in my own heart. When we were children together the little maid had been my sweetheart, and as we grew up, although my brain was busy with other matters, yet my heart was faithful to her, and gradually, as the down coarsened on my cheeks, so also those nebulous, intangible fancies and desires, the floss out of which is woven love, became as ropes of steel, binding the present to the future. That kiss I spoke of turned them into ropes of sand.

Looking back, after the lapse of years, and with such experience of life as I have gleaned, I can see how ill-equipped the poor scholar was to play the part of lover. I might have won her, the pretty dear, had I wooed her—as maids wish to be wooed—ardently; but love with me was a thing apart from life, laid in lavender, kept under lock and key. None guessed my secret save Letty, and I know she was kinder to me on that account, more tender, more lovable, so that I was the more inflamed, and my loss, contrasted with Courtenay's gain, proved a grievous and intolerable burden. For he seemed to have all the gifts of the gods, and could have chosen a wife out of the Book of Beauty, or out of that other book that Englishmen hold sacred—the Peerage—and yet he had been constrained to rob me, his

foster-brother and true friend, of a simple country maid.

None the less, I can say that I still loved him and admired him. Now, it is plain that he often imposed upon that love and admiration, being at the core somewhat selfish and thoughtless of others' feelings. He learned early the expediency of never doing for himself what another might do for him. When we were lads, I remember, he would ask me again and again the time of day, although he carried a handsome gold watch of his own, and he would borrow half-a-crown with the air of a monarch conferring the Order of the Golden Fleece. It seems now, although then such a thought never entered my head, that in regard to his wooing he had unwittingly suffered me, so to speak, to prepare the soil that he might reap the crop, for I cannot doubt that Letty, marking my amorous glances, learned the first lesson of love—anticipation. Expecting (the witch confessed it later) something from me and getting nothing, she fell an easy victim to the silver-tongued Courtenay.

My message mellowed somewhat during the time that elapsed between the kiss I gave blushing Letty and the moment that I found myself alone with her lover. I had not the heart to deliver it in her presence, for both she and he had quick tempers, and I feared that they might marry in haste, whipped to folly by Sir Marmaduke's keen tongue. In Spain I had learned the meaning of the word "mañana," and accordingly urged not renunciation but procrastination.

Finally, we agreed, that for the present it would be wise to keep secret the engagement. I promised

to tell my mother at once, and did so that same afternoon. Dear woman! the match was of her making, and it pains me, now that she is dead, to criticise so fond a creature. Yet, who can deny that she acted unwisely? She was monstrously pleased when she learned that the lovers had actually plighted troth, and her vanity so bubbled and flowed over that I could not but smile, and lacked the moral courage to protest against it. Moreover, I dared not speak out what was festering in my mind, fearing that I might betray myself. I had agreed with Courtenay that Sir Marmaduke must be advised that his message was duly delivered, and my mother firmly believed that the wind would be tempered to these lambs. "Sir Marmaduke," she said innocently, "is failing; he ate but once of my pie, and shunned the ginger cordial. He cannot plague us much longer."

The Baronet thanked me civilly, and asked no questions. My face, you may be sure, was blank as a stone wall, yet he guessed, I fancy, what I tried to conceal, and smiled doubtless in his sleeve at the donkey who counted himself a diplomat. Courtenay swore to me that he would be careful not to compromise Letty by too ardent attentions, and the pair of us actually believed that we were throwing dust in Sir Marmaduke's eyes. Lord, what fools we were!

Austin, of course, watched us out of the tail of his eye, and beguiled my mother to the very brink of confession. "I'm sure," said she, "that he is our friend, and he has influence with Sir Marmaduke." 'Tis true that he had influence with his father, and

to this day I am unable to account for so strange a fact; for the two had little in common, save an insane and un-Christian pride of the house of Valence, a pride conspicuously wanting in Courtenay, who, with my mother's milk, perhaps, imbibed a yeoman's simplicity and sense of humour. The ludicrous appealed to my foster-brother as strongly as it appeals to me, and what is more likely to stir men to laughter than the windy, bombastic self-assertion and arrogance of an egoist of the stamp of Austin Valence? Believing him to be a prig of prigs, we stupidly belittled him, and paid dearly for our folly.

One day, late in September, Courtenay and I rode into Southampton, and there, coming out of a tavern near the docks, whom should we see but old Mark Jaynes, the friend and hero of our youth. He was little changed; the broad face had a purplish cast, and he carried a larger paunch; the nose, too, seemed a thought longer and sharper, as if it had poked itself into more than one tight place since we last had seen it. We were strolling along afoot, having left our horses in charge of the hostler at the White Hart Inn, so we purposely ran athwart the captain, and then heaving-to, craved his pardon.

"Is this Captain Jaynes?" said Courtenay, doffing his hat and bowing.

"Ay," growled the captain, "Mark Jaynes it is—at your service, gentlemen."

"We must arrest you," said Courtenay.

The old fellow began to bristle up.

"On the criminal charge," continued Courtenay, "of cutting dead two old friends."

A grin betokened recognition.

“It’s Master Courtenay and John Charity.”

We each took an arm, and escorted him in triumph back to the tavern he had just left. There we engaged a private room and a bottle of Madeira, and later—for the wine was poor stuff—a bowl of punch. For a time our three tongues wagged at once; then the captain, who had a fine gift of the gab, began to recite his adventures, and the old glamour spread its spell upon us. Smuggling, it seemed, was at an end, and our friend was now master and part owner of a fine barque about to sail for the Californias with a cargo of general merchandise.

“’Tis my last trip,” said the captain. “I shall marry a señorita”—he smacked his thick lips—“and settle down upon a rancho. There is no finer country than Alta California upon God’s footstool—a land, my lads, of milk and honey. And the women love the sailors. The Dons—ay, the bluest blooded of ’em—admit it, and are like to go mad because of it. By the Lord! didn’t my own boatswain, red-headed Ben Buston from Winchester, marry a beauty, with a name as long as a man-o’-war’s pennant, and a big estate pinned to her petticoat? He had to join the true church, o’ course; but there——” and he winked in the old, delightful fashion. “Ben told me that he left his conscience at Cape Horn in charge o’ Mother Carey’s chickens, and I hope it didn’t choke ’em. The *padre* at the Mission in Santa Barbara made Ben walk barefoot, with not a stitch on but a sheet, a-holding a lighted taper in his hand, from the beach to the church door; but behind the door was the

señorita, and behind the Mission the good leagues o' land!"

To this, and much more, we listened, vastly amused at the thought of this ancient mariner wedded to a blooming Californian and lord of rolling leagues and countless herds. You may be sure that we visited the barque, and inspected, with interest, the captain's curios: abalone shells, pearls from the Peninsula, some wondrous baskets, weaved by the Indians so closely and cunningly that they actually held water, opals from Mexico, and an amazing bit and bridle, inwrought with gold and silver. Before we parted Mark Jaynes opened a bottle of Cognac, that I'll warrant had paid no duty, and we drank solemnly to the lotos-land and the lovely women, not forgetting honest Ben Buston and the red-headed babies that his wife had borne him.

"My lads," said Mark, in conclusion, "I would that a sight of Alta California could be vouchsafed ye. It hath a glorious future, sure, and 'twill belong in time to our people. The Yankees are crossing the mountains already, but I look to see the flag of England float above the *presidio* at Monterey. These Dons are an indolent lot, pleasure-loving, content to lie in the sun gorged with beef and *frijol*, and the good *padres* who ruled the land well and wisely have seen their sun set for ever. Ye were lads of spirit, I mind me; why don't ye up anchor, and sail with old Mark Jaynes to the Canaan that lies upon the shores of the Pacific?"

And why not, we asked ourselves, as we rode home through the pleasant woods of Stoneham—why not?

Fate answered that question within twenty-four hours.

I have now to set down (in ink no blacker than the story) the history of an attempt on the part of Austin Valence to rob Letty of fair name and reputation. The scoundrel, a spy and an eavesdropper, must have learned that this pure maid was as far from his reach as the evening star; and knowing also, or guessing, that Courtenay was her plighted lover, having, moreover, his finger upon the pulse of Sir Marmaduke's pride, in possession doubtless of the message intrusted to me, coveting, perhaps, the handsome allowance of his brother and the money that would be his at the Baronet's death—bearing, in short, all these matters in mind, he conceived a hellish scheme of revenge. He told the officers quartered at Winchester, and others of his acquaintance, that his brother Courtenay was pursuing a common amour, and skilfully painted him as a Lothario; yet he hinted, with incredible baseness, that this was no case of seduction, inasmuch as the young woman had bestowed her favours upon others, including one who was not given to boasting of his *bonnes fortunes*. I make certain he calculated that either Courtenay would be hounded into hasty marriage and ruin by the yapping of the gossips, or Lettice, falling a victim to slander, and driven from her true lover's arms, might become his own prey.

Upon the day we met Mark Jaynes the mine laid by this villain prematurely exploded. It happened on this wise. Courtenay and I had accepted an invita-

tion to sup at the George Inn, in Winchester, with an old Wykehamist, an officer quartered in the town. Austin was of the party, and a good deal of wine was drunk and as many jests cracked as bottles. Presently a certain captain of cavalry, quite unknown to me, the son of a rich merchant in London—a man of fashion but of no breeding—began to rally Courtenay upon his love intrigue.

“Egad!” said this buck, who was more fool than knave; “I hear that the girl is a famous beauty, and has made more than one man happy. We wondered why you had forsaken your old friends, my dear fellow; but tell us her name, and promise me an introduction, and we will toast her—this Venus of Cranberry-Orcas!”

“Sir,” replied my foster-brother, “you talk in riddles. I know of no such lady, nor is it my habit to forsake old friends, nor to overlook the insolence of new ones.”

He was furiously angry, I could see, but outwardly cool and collected. The captain flushed and laughed harshly.

“You are dense to-night,” he retorted quickly. “Come, I will give you a clue to the enigma. We have Scriptural warrant that there be three blessings vouchsafed to good men—Faith, Hope, and Charity, and the greatest of these, as you must know, is Charity.”

The table was in a tumult as the words left his lips, for those present, excepting the speaker, knew my name, and knew also that I was of kin to the lady. Perhaps my yeoman’s blood moves somewhat

sluggishly, for before I could act, so stunned was I at this stranger's speech, Courtenay had taken the initiative. He held in his hand a cut-glass goblet of champagne, and this he hurled at the face opposite with so true an aim that in a second the captain found himself drenched with wine and blood.

"Curse you!" sputtered the dandy, convulsed with pain. "I'll kill you for this, Courtenay Valence."

My foster-brother bowed. "We cannot meet too soon," said he coldly.

Then I pushed forward. "'Tis my affair," said I fiercely. "My name is Charity, and charity foully abused, as this gentleman will find, is even a greater curse than a blessing."

But here the others interfered, and Captain Phillipson was dragged from the room by a couple of friends. I turned to my foster-brother and repeated that it was my affair.

"Gentlemen," said he, "I appeal to you. Whose affair is this?"

"Faith!" exclaimed a grizzled major, "you have set your brand upon the captain, and he'll do his best to return the compliment, or I don't know the man."

"Jack," said Courtenay, "you shall act for me, and by God, if I fall you can try your luck."

As he spoke I caught Austin's eye, and marked the expression upon his ugly face. My befogged wits were clear in a jiffy. 'Twas he who had wrought this evil.

"Courtenay," said I, "you will forgive me when you learn my reason, but I cannot be your friend now. Find another man."

He turned from me with a gesture of annoyance; then he approached Austin.

"I must ask you, brother, to receive the message that Phillipson must send. The honour of the Valences is safe in your hands."

"Pray excuse me," murmured Austin coldly. "You acted hastily, and should apologise."

Courtenay stared at him in amazement and laughed.

"Something more than skin and glass has been cracked to-night," he said, "and no apology will mend *that*. Stracey," he spoke to our host, "will you refuse to help me?"

"Not I," said Stracey, taking his arm. "Come, this is no place for you. Major, my friend and I may be found at the Black Swan opposite. Perhaps you will so advise Captain Phillipson's seconds. I wish you all good-night."

As the door closed upon Courtenay and our old school-fellow, I came forward and spoke.

"Gentlemen, some of you know my cousin, and you all know me. The villain who has tried to stain the fair fame of the best and purest maiden in the Itchen Valley stands *there*," and I pointed to Austin Valence, "and my mark shall be placed on him."

With that I caught him by the nose, a large and amorphous nose that came to him from the distaff side, held it firmly between thumb and forefinger, and with my open right hand struck him twice upon the cheek. Such honest powder lay behind the blow that he spun round like a teetotum, and dropped half-senseless to the floor.

"Major," said I, "a word with you downstairs."

“With pleasure,” he replied, for he had no love for Austin Valence, and we left the supper room arm-in-arm.

The meetings that followed have been described elsewhere, for they brought about, indirectly, the famous ordinance of 1844, that ukase of the Commander-in-Chief which forbade, under severest penalties, the practice of duelling in the British Army, a practice, be it noted, that had the support and approval of His Grace the Duke of Wellington. We fought with pistols, at the same time and place, a fact that lent the double event notoriety. Fearing the interference of the police, we met early, upon the morning following the supper, on the Winchester Downs, hard by that clump of trees known as Oliver Cromwell’s Battery. Courtenay heard from my lips that I was about to meet his brother, and had no objections to offer. Indeed from the major I learned the whole truth, for that gallant officer was in possession of the garrison gossip, and Austin, so he told me, had sown his seed far and wide: most indiscreetly, the major said, not taking into account the fact that malice and hatred will whistle down the wind the prudence and judgment of even a Shylock. Moreover, Austin disapproved the saying that conscience makes cowards of us, for he faced my pistol with a grim smile, and the determination, plain upon his face, to kill me if Fortune stood his friend. While the preliminaries of our affair were being arranged, and I was marvelling at the great self-control and coolness displayed by men when lives other than their own were at stake (the major was

in high good-humour, and Austin's second had a Roland pat in exchange for an Oliver), Courtenay and Captain Phillipson fired; and soon after Stracey came running up from the far side of the Battery with the welcome news that Phillipson had been winged, that my foster-brother was not touched, and that the captain had apologised for his misdemeanour and declared himself satisfied. I gripped the butt of my pistol the firmer for this intelligence, and Austin's cheek—the one I had not slapped—turned, I fancied, a pale saffron in hue, but this may have been a trick of the sun, which rose at that instant behind a reek of blue smoke.

Then I heard the major's jolly voice, crisp and clear: "Gentlemen, you will fire at the word three. The man who reserves his fire, for even the fraction of a second, will be held responsible to me and to society."

I paid no attention to him, but fixed my glance upon Austin. Frankly, I hoped to kill him, and wished from the bottom of my heart that a sword and not a pistol were in my hand.

"One!" said the major, and I felt my muscles tighten.

"Two!" I caressed the trigger.

"*Three!*"

We fired together, and a bullet grazed my left shoulder. Then I saw Austin stagger forward, gripping his smoking pistol, and fall headlong. The others, including the doctor, ran to his assistance; but I stood still, trembling and distraught with anxiety. Now that my enemy lay prostrate before me, I prayed that

he was not dead, yet I knew that my aim had been good, that my bullet must lie near his heart. It seemed an eternity before the major joined me, and said gravely that my ball had passed through the left lung.

"He has his gruel," said the major. "It would be wise for both of us to lie snug till the noise of this affair has abated."

"Michaelmas Term begins on the Tenth," said I.

"Egad!" replied the veteran, "this morning's work, my lad, has robbed you of your honours at Oxford. Come, cheer up, it might be worse—ay? What if you were lying there?"

So I hugged such comfort as his words suggested to my bosom, and started hot foot for the Abbey Farm. There I took my father aside and told him what had passed. To my surprise, he took the matter very coolly.

"Jack," said he, "thou art not the stuff they make bookworms out of, and I'm right glad you struck a stout blow in defence of the little lass. The villain hath his deserts, I'll warrant. And now, my lad, as the major says, thou must lie snug. Pack thy duds and be off to Southampton, and there take the first ship sailing for foreign parts. I can give thee money, for, as luck would have it, I have here a draft on Baring's for two hundred pounds, the price of my fat steers, and I can spare all of it to a good son. And now—as time presses—be off. Kiss thy mother and the little lass, and leave all further speech to me."

I told him briefly that I had a friend in need in old Mark Jaynes, and that the Californias might prove my

destination. My father whistled, but made no objections, and promised to send me word of Austin before the barque sailed. I had seen Courtenay for a minute, and he told me that as soon as a lodging was found for Austin he would join me in Southampton. Although we had spoken of Alta California, he had said nothing of accompanying me, yet I feared that he would find a sorry welcome at the Court and an oak door, may be, slammed in his face. The Dean, too, if he heard of the duel, would not suffer him to return to Christ Church.

Although two hundred pounds was a sum larger than my necessities, I was forced to accept it for the present, for the draft, like the babe of the woman who appealed to Solomon, could not be divided. I reflected also that my father was well-to-do, and would surely be offended if I refused his gift. Perhaps my mother marvelled at the kisses I pressed upon her comely face, but she and Lettice were busy in the making of crab-apple jelly, and both bade me good-temperedly begone. 'Twas indeed a blessed dispensation, for I have no stomach for partings, and had those two fond creatures suspected the truth, I had got a surfeit of grief; and my heart was heavy enough, you may take your oath, without being freighted with women's tears.

The comical part of the story was my reception by Mark Jaynes, and the bloodthirsty delight he took in the recital of my woes, for woes indeed they were to me, and I counted myself as sorely wounded as Austin Valence. I have not spoken of my college career, but it was not without promise, and I had learned to love

the *pulverem Olympicum*, the dust of competition that lies thick in the schools, choking the many and stimulating the few. And now the bays within my grasp had withered !

“ Killed a man,” exclaimed old Mark, slapping his thigh ; “ d’ye call him a man, a puppy that ’twere flattery to call a dog ? Cheer up, my bully boy, and believe me that this parson’s gabble about the sanctity of human life is only fit to stuff a goose with—green sauce, Jack, to one who hath fought under Lord Nelson. Do I sleep the less soundly because I’ve slit many a Frenchman’s throat ? Not I, my lad,” and he stretched out his long, sinewy arms, and laughed hoarsely.

“ And the honours the scholars prate of and prize ! What are they, Jack ? Spume of the sea ! Spume of the sea ! Why, the applause of your musty Dons would be no more to a sailor than the humming of the wind in the ratlins. Your hand, my lad, for you’re a man now, and have tasted blood.”

I could not keep my face straight, for Mark Jaynes, I knew, had a tender heart beneath his rough pilot coat, and this Cambyzes vein was assumed as a token of sympathy. Finally, I laughed myself into a happier humour, and discussed with better appetite plans for the future. The captain, however, opined that Southampton was no place to lie snug in—too near to Cranberry-Orcas, a town *infested* (’twas his word) with constables. The barque, he said, would not sail for a week, for the cargo was not all aboard, and meantime I might be arrested at any minute and clapped into gaol. He painted the perils of the moment in such vivid and startling colours, that I presently agreed to

slip aboard a lugger sailing on the next tide for Plymouth. The captain winked so furiously, when he spoke of the lugger and the three men who sailed her, that I was led to infer that the joint-owners of the boat were as little anxious as I to linger long in Southampton. He assured me that I would be perfectly safe in their hands, and that he would pick me up a week hence off a fishing village in Devonshire, and would further charge himself with the purchase of an outfit suitable for one in my condition. Accordingly I placed my draft in his hands to be cashed, and he provided me with a few sovereigns, a suit of stout cloth, and a heavy cap such as pilots use—a most effective, if not becoming, disguise, or rather face-extinguisher, for it left no features visible save the nose and upper lip.

We were to sail at midnight, and at nine by my watch Courtenay Valence found Jaynes and me at the tavern near the docks, where we had made merry the day before. He told me at once that Austin was like to die, and that a warrant was out for my arrest. He had seen Sir Marmaduke, he added, but Captain Philipson had written the Baronet a very handsome letter, setting forth the facts of the case, and placing the blame, where it belonged, upon Austin, “but, I fear,” said Courtenay, “that my father, who has met the captain, does not hold him in the highest esteem.” I thought this so very probable that I answered nothing, and my own affairs clamouring for attention, we fell to discussing them, and forbore to speculate upon what Sir Marmaduke would do or not do.

My leave-taking with my foster-brother affected me deeply. His eyes were wet as he pressed my hand at

parting, and my own were not dry. But he said not a word of taking passage to California, and I felt that his heart was at Cranberry-Orcas.

Where else could it have been?

And yet I was not suffered to sail alone to a foreign and distant land, for when, ten days later, I stepped aboard the barque, and bade good-bye to the owners of the lugger, who had sheltered me faithfully when the whole South of England was ringing with my name, and when Mark Jaynes held out his hand in greeting, I could feel in the magnetic pressure of that clasp and read in his sly, sparkling eyes that something of extraordinary interest had transpired. He stood by my side till the lugger was a dozen cable-lengths astern. Then he pinched my arm, and led me, as home-sick a wretch as ever was driven from his native shore, to the companion-way and down into the main cabin, and there, with his arm around her waist, stood Courtenay Valence and—Lettice.

CHAPTER IV.

ALTA CALIFORNIA.

“JACK,” said my foster-brother, “let me introduce you to——my wife.”

At first I was so overwhelmed with surprise, so delighted at the sight of their kind, eager faces, that I had no words for them save those of affection and congratulation. Letty was rather pale, not being accustomed

to the motion of a ship, so, when the excitement had abated, she went below, and then Courtenay told me at length what had passed since he bade me adieu on Southampton Water.

Sir Marmaduke, it seemed, had hastened to the sick-bed of Austin, who was now like to recover, though not entirely out of danger. Courtenay added bitterly that the villain, so far from repenting of the evil he had wrought, had poured such poison into his father's ears that he—Sir Marmaduke—was fain to believe the shameful stories about Letty, stories now circulating in every pot-house within a ten-mile radius of Cranberry-Orcas. An old rake—even one of whom it was said that he protected women against all men save himself—is quick to impute evil; and although Courtenay pleaded poor Letty's cause to the best of his ability—with indiscreet passion, I doubt not—the Baronet merely smiled cynically, and remarked that he had been young and foolish himself. Whereupon my foster-brother lost both his wits and his temper, and flew into such a fury that Sir Marmaduke not only commanded him to hold his peace, but further warned him, under the severest penalties, not to set foot on the Abbey Farm. Courtenay swore to me that he could find but one way to silence the tongues of the gossips. He bought a special licence, and with my parents' consent married the woman he loved.

“And I thought of you, Jack,” he added, “setting sail alone for a land that few have heard of. And I told your father what Mark Jaynes told us about the opportunities that were as ripe pippins on a tree; and, by the Lord Harry, there is nothing to regret, old

fellow. I have the best wife and the staunchest friend that man ever had, a heart full of hope, and a sack full of gold."

"A sack full of gold?" I repeated, knowing the habits of this youth. "Who gave you that?"

"My father," said Courtenay, the smile fading from his face. "He sent me a thousand pounds and this letter, which I will read you. I had a mind to return both, but there was Lettice to think of, and all our pockets needed lining."

Then he read aloud the following letter:—

"SIR,—You will find enclosed my cheque in your favour for one thousand pounds, all that you may expect from me, living or dead. You have flagrantly set my authority at defiance, and must accept the consequences. I send you this money because I wish to assist you in leaving England. The more miles you place between us the better I shall be pleased. So far as I am concerned, these are your funeral expenses. Faithfully yours,
MARMADUKE VALENCE."

The letter was sealed with the big seal that always lay upon the Baronet's desk, and I noted the different quarterings, including the Plantagenet lions passant gardant, for Sir Marmaduke claimed descent from John of Gaunt. Not a spilled speck of wax betrayed haste or nervousness; the impression was as clean cut as Sir Marmaduke's aquiline nose; the fine delicate handwriting was the outward and visible sign of a cold and conscious determination. Many changes might await Courtenay and me, but the man to whom

one of us owed his birth and breeding, and the other his education, would die as he had lived—heartless, inflexible, unforgiving.

Having noted the care exercised, I returned the letter to my friend with a sigh.

“Gad!” said he ruefully, “I thought the sight of us would warm the very cockles of your heart, but you look as cold as this blue water.”

“It beats me,” I muttered, “how you obtained my father’s consent to your marriage.”

“I’ve a tongue,” he laughed in reply, “and know how to use it. Your mother stood my friend.”

His happiness and faith in the future put my fears to flight. After all, I reflected, these great matters of life and marriage and death lie beyond comprehension and criticism. Yet my mind misgave me when I thought of Lettice, a maid scarce out of the school-room, ill-equipped to suffer hardship, torn from my mother’s arms, flung from a warm nest before her pin-feathers were grown. However, honest Mark consoled me. “California,” said he, “is no wilderness. The Spaniards are a gentle, mirth-loving people. ’Tis a land of *meriendas* (picnics) and sunshine. And I’ll warrant that this fair-faced, golden-haired lady will be worshipped as a goddess. My friends at Monterey and Santa Barbara have never seen the like.”

“Surely there are some English women there?”

“May be. I have not seen one. When we land there will be staring eyes at the *presidio* and beating hearts, for these Dons dearly love the sight of a beauty.” He chuckled and rubbed his big hands together. “By God, she’ll prove a rare advertise-

ment to me; for our goods, look you, will be sold aboard."

As we paced the deck together (Courtenay had gone below to his wife), the old fellow opened his heart, which I have said before was of the softest. He was close on sixty, yet he, too, hoped to hold a bride in his arms, and this hope made him wondrous kind to the lovers. The cuddy was filled with delicacies, cordials, preserves, tinned goods, and the like; forward, beyond the cook's galley, were pigs, sheep, and four big coops of chickens; and aft the men had rigged up an awning, beneath which were some comfortable chairs and a table. I told the captain that his vessel might have been a private yacht, and he answered, proudly, that few yachts were as well found as the *Heron* (that was the name of the barque), and none, he added, could outsail her on a long voyage. Courtenay, moreover, had provided books, not forgetting some favourites of mine, and he and Jaynes had bought me an excellent outfit.

Lettice soon found her sea-legs. She and Courtenay were perfectly happy and contented; for the first month aboard the *Heron* was a honeymoon such as falls to the lot of few. We struck a spell of fine weather on leaving the English Channel; the wind was abeam, and our gallant ship slid through the roaring forties at a pace that amazed even the skipper. Both he and the mate opined that our luck was too good to last, but after crossing the Equator we caught the S.E. trade, and sped merrily on to Rio, our first stopping-place. By this time the three of us knew the names of every article aboard from the truck

to the false-keel. Knots were no longer knots to us; we could splice a rope, build up sennit, take an observation, and talk knowingly about currents. After leaving Rio we encountered head winds, and old Jaynes refused to risk the passage through the Straits of Magellan (now the common route, but then much to be dreaded unless sailing from the Pacific to the Atlantic). Instead, we made the Straits of Le Maire, and passed through in safety, although the weather was of the dirtiest and our decks so wet that for more than forty-eight hours we dared not venture outside the cuddy. We met more than one iceberg, but (advised of its proximity by the falling of the mercury in the ship's thermometer) were enabled to steer clear. Jaynes told me that he feared ice as he did the devil, and it seems that in these latitudes vagabond bergs have sent more men to Davy's locker than wind and sea together; and wind and sea together off Cape Horn can make mountains in five minutes out of molehills. We got well to windward before turning north, and were fortunate enough to find once more the S.E. trade, our best friend, and also the ocean current that sets in the same direction. Indeed the Pacific spread beneath our keel the bluest and smoothest carpet in the world. There is something indescribably enchanting about these summer seas. The lazy, leisurely roll of the ship, the soft, balmy breezes, the sense of isolation and distance, the vague, opalescent mists that steal so often and so noiselessly across the waters—these weave a spell that broods for ever in the memory.

One day Courtenay, who was active as a cat, made a wager with the bo'sun that he would climb to the

main-truck, and despite my remonstrance essayed what is held to be no easy feat for a land-lubber. As he was swarming up the bare pole, Lettice appeared on deck and became distraught with anxiety. The poor girl clutched my arm, and 'twas then, I think, that I realised the great love she bore her husband. What danger there was passed in a moment, and by the time Courtenay had regained the ratlins her fears had turned to anger, and she upbraided *me* bitterly for permitting such folly, as if I indeed were folly's keeper. Old Mark mixed a bowl of punch in honour of the occasion, but not a drop would Mistress Valence swallow till Courtenay had sworn upon her lips a promise to keep nearer earth. "'Tis not alone your neck that you risk, but my heart," she said with a tearful smile.

"Dearest," he replied, "you are right. I thought to get nearer heaven, but my heaven is here"—and he kissed her again.

Presently they wandered aft; and old Jaynes winked his blood-shot left eye and smacked his lips.

"You and I, my lad," said this ancient sinner, "will find our heaven, and *soon*, I'll warrant! By God, sir, a man without a wife is a sheer hulk adrift in a stormy sea. There is that rogue, Ben Buston; within six weeks we shall clap eyes on his señora and the red-headed brats. Ben and I were shipmates aboard one of the finest frigates in his Majesty's Navy; but Ben lies at anchor now, and this is my last voyage."

I will frankly confess that at this time I was in no mood to talk of love, being somewhat soured, and

—knowing nothing of women—somewhat disgusted with the humours of the fair. It seemed to me, I remember, a monstrous thing that I should be blamed by Letty for her husband's folly. Truly, I had much to learn!

We touched at Valparaiso for fresh water, meat, and vegetables. Here, in Chili's principal port, I was made aware of the extraordinary effect of Letty's blonde beauty upon men who had seen brunettes alone. As we walked the streets we were fairly mobbed, though the Latin race, I confess, is politer than the Anglo-Saxon—and the black-a-vized Chileños were most careful not to hustle us nor to impede our progress. But the admiring glances that fell upon Letty's golden curls were not to be misinterpreted; and the little baggage, you may be sure, missed none of them.

"I told you, Jack," said old Mark, "that she would drive them crazy. These Dons have a pretty taste in women, and this one has set 'em afire."

I could not contradict him, and was not sorry to find the stout planks of the *Heron* beneath my feet, and to see the lovely bay of Valparaiso fading astern. I reflected that a madder business than bringing this pretty firebrand from our cool northern country into these tropical latitudes had never been undertaken by sane men. Courtenay joked about it, and said that my solemn face would extinguish an *auto-da-fé*; the hour was not far distant when he looked graver than I.

The truth is that if Lettice was a pretty girl when she left Cranberry-Orcas, she was now a beautiful

woman—quite another matter. Love and ozone had lent magic tints to eyes and cheeks, seducing curves to limbs and bosom. The Latin maidens are very lovely when young, and the most accomplished coquettes under high heaven; but they are creatures of the night, daughters of the moon and stars, whereas Letty was a true child of the sun.

At Acapulco we took aboard a passenger, a very honourable caballero, a Government official, as sly a looking fellow as I ever saw. From him we learned that, in 1836, Alvarado had proclaimed Alta California an independent state (this, of course, in defiance of presidential authority in Mexico), and, after a bloodless revolution, had invested himself with the powers of a dictator. Later, perceiving that the country could not possibly maintain its independence, he had sent despatches to President Bustamente, submitting his allegiance, and demanding recognition as *El Gobernador Constitucional de Alta California*. Meantime Carlos Carrillo, the most powerful man in Southern California, had been appointed Governor in place of Alvarado. Civil war, in a word, was impending, for Alvarado refused to recognise Carrillo as chief executive.

Our passenger, Don Miguel Soto (I'm ready to swear that he had no more right than I to the ducal name of Soto), was kind enough to assure me of his everlasting friendship and anxiety to place all he had ('twas precious little) at my disposition. As this fellow will figure in these memoirs I make no apology for describing him at length. You may picture to yourself a tall and graceful man, clad in an absurd

green and yellow uniform, almost covered by a large black cape. He was of a pale complexion that contrasted queerly with a pair of bristling blue-black moustachios, and blue-black brows overhung two eyes that proclaimed this apocryphal Don's kinship with the red race, for the irids were tawny as a wild-cat's, and encircled with a peculiar, glaucous-coloured ring. Pendent from these gems, for gems they were in lustre and coruscation, was a long, thin, pointed nose. For the rest, he was handsome in his way, and—as we learned later—a remarkable horseman. The Don knew no word of English, and was ignorant upon all matters not directly connected with himself. The sun rose and set for him on the Pacific Slope. I discovered this—for he was too clever to be easily caught—by accident. One afternoon, as we were talking together, he showed me a sword of which he was inordinately proud, and as he pulled it from the scabbard assured me that it had been for more than a century in the possession of the Sotos; that it had been forged and tempered in Toledo, and so on and so forth, calling the Blessed Virgin and all the saints to attest what proved a farrago of lies. For, examining carefully this heirloom, I found upon the blade a tell-tale name—"Philadelphia."

"That word," said Don Miguel airily, "I cannot translate. If the señor, who is, doubtless, a scholar, will interpret——" He bowed and smirked, and for my life I couldn't help smiling.

"It means brotherly love," I replied. "A curious word to engrave upon a sword. There is a city of that name in the United States."

The friend of Alvarado pulled his moustachios.'

"Is there?" he muttered. "I assure you, señor, I have never heard of such a town. It is possible that this village you mention—ah! city you say—yes, this city, then, was named after my sword here, which has been, as I have told you, in the possession of the Sotos for so many generations."

I had wit enough to hide my dislike of this hidalgo, but Lettice refused to play the hypocrite, and the repugnance with which she received his compliments and flatteries provoked dreadful scowls from the cavalier; indeed, he protested to me, with many oaths, that woman had never so used him before. Nothing pleased him better than to boast of his *bonnes fortunes*; few ladies, according to him, were proof against the assaults of Don Miguel Maria Soto.

Since, I have wondered what our fortunes might have been had Letty concealed her dislike of this man. I cannot doubt that he hated her, and that his hatred proved a Pandora's box of troubles. To my surprise and annoyance, Courtenay fell an easy prey to the Don's flattery, and each day they walked and talked together, notwithstanding my remonstrance.

"He is false as Judas," said I to my foster-brother.

"Pooh, pooh," he laughed. "He has promised to be our friend at court."

"At which court?" I asked; for 'twas plain that we had come to California in troublous times.

"I fancy he favours the South," said Courtenay; "but depend upon it he will trim his sails to the strongest wind, and he has as good as told me that our future shall be his care."

“Words are cheap,” I retorted hotly. “And, mark you, Courtenay, with a wife aboard, you had better steer clear of such craft. He carries the black flag, or I do him a grievous wrong.”

My foster-brother smiled amiably.

“Dear little Letty,” said he. “Do you know, Jack, she is really jealous because I walk with the Don.”

I had noted this already, and had tried to console the pretty creature—quite in vain. I had now but a brother’s affection for her. ’Tis a drastic remedy, but let a love-sick swain accompany a successful rival and his wife around the Horn, and I’ll warrant that his wound will be healed before he passes the Golden Gate. None the less, a scar remains.

“She is yours to make or mar,” I rejoined; and he smiled again with the conceit of youth.

We did not touch at either San Diego or Los Angeles, but steered straight for the Pacific capital, hugging the coast. The Santa Lucia Mountains fringed the eastern horizon, and the foothills were aglow with colour after abundant rains. It seemed to our sea-weary eyes a paradise of peace and plenty, well watered, for every ravine had its rivulet, thickly wooded and covered with rich grasses and wild flowers—poppies, the yellowest in the world, lupine imperially purple, and wild lilac. When the land breeze filled our sails, the perfume of the sage and other aromatic herbs floated across the shimmering waters, and the nights were so balmy that from choice I slept on deck.

Upon the morning of February 15th we passed the old mission of Santa Cruz, from which the bells were

ringing for matins, and shortly after were lying snugly, with all sails furled, off Monterey. I cannot say that the first sight of the capital was inspiring. The place is finely situated, but the Don confessed that it had made no progress to brag of in five-and-twenty years. He pointed out to me the castle, a whitewashed adobe fort crowning a hill, the plaza, and some of the better houses belonging to his friends. These were all built of adobe and roofed with bright red tiles, and the only building worth looking at was the Presidio Church, with its handsome tower. Almost immediately the Custom House barge came alongside, and the Don, Jaynes, and I went ashore, leaving Lettice with her husband. I carried with me my passport that I had procured before I went to Spain, Courtenay's passport for himself and wife, and some other papers. After some formalities had been observed we were received by Alvarado, and courteously treated by him and his staff. The Governor proved to be a handsome man—tall, finely formed, with black curly hair, an aquiline nose, white teeth, olive complexion, and charming manners. He made himself particularly civil to old Mark, and complimented me upon my Castilian accent. Then, after promising to pay his respects to Letty, whom Soto had described to those present as a doña of surpassing loveliness, he retired, and we were free to exchange greetings with the British and American residents.

To cut a tedious story short, the Custom House chief agreed with Jaynes, on receipt of a lump sum down, that our cargo should be sold from the ship both here and at Santa Barbara, and the sum paid, so Jaynes told me, was much less than he had anticipated. Our

pleasure at this good fortune was somewhat dampened, however, by a talk with Thomas Larkin, an American, who was in the confidence of His Excellency. We learned from him also that Carrillo had assumed the purple in the south, and that both parties were at daggers-drawn, although as yet no blood had been shed.

“Alvarado needs friends,” said Mr. Larkin, with a significant glance at Jaynes, “and to that fact you can lay the warmth of your reception.”

“He needs the blunt, too,” replied old Mark, with his wicked wink, for the port dues and duties had been largely commuted in His Excellency’s interests; “but we want land, Tom, and plenty of the best in California.”

“Ah,” said the Bostonian, “that, gentlemen, is not his to give—yet.”

CHAPTER V.

MAGDALENA ESTRADA.

THE days that followed were filled with sunshine and laughter; with *meriendas*, horse-racing, bull-fights, and bowls (Thomas Larkin had an excellent alley); with much eating of spiced dishes; much drinking of strong waters. In early days, *ora et labora* (work and pray) had been the motto of the padres; and before the secularisation of the missions none disputed their sovereign authority, but now 'twas play and pray, and

more of the former than of the latter. We were given the freedom of Monterey, and the best people vied with each other in entertainment of the Ingleses.

At the ball given by Alvarado in our honour Madame Letty wore her wedding dress, and a diamond star, the gift of that spendthrift Courtenay, blazed in her golden hair. The gown was of satin, and the Dons said that surely she had dropped from heaven. These good Catholics were, to a man, only too ready to bow the knee and worship this fair divinity from over-seas.

"She is white as milk," I heard the wife of an *alférez* say. "*Virgen Santisima!* She has a look of the Madonna."

On this occasion I first met Magdalena Estrada. The Governor introduced me to the señorita, but I had already learned from Soto that she was the only child of a Spaniard of degree, that she was betrothed to a wealthy Mexican, and that the famous Rancho Santa Margarita (which had belonged to her dead mother) was a portion of her dowry. She had just passed her seventeenth birthday, and was esteemed by the *caballeros* a wit and a beauty, fairer of skin than most of the Montereyenas, and nimbler of tongue. But what captivated my fancy was the splendour of her eyes and the pensive, pathetic droop of her mouth. Before she spoke to me I was sensible of a thrill, a bitter-sweet pang, a premonition, may be, of pain and pleasure. She seemed different from other maidens. In Letty I had admired and loved simplicity, purity, innocence; but in Magdalena something far more subtle appealed to me. And the charm was allusive, cunningly compounded of speech and silence, of mirth

and melancholy. For her silence was more eloquent than speech, and tears lurked in her laughter. When she wept—this I discovered later—she would often pause to smile, and the witchery and pitifulness of these smiles would make my own eyes wet. Now that I am old I see that she was a true type of her race, a child of to-morrow, in that she repudiated the troubles of to-day, and a daughter of yesterday, in that the glory and beauty of her was of the past rather than the present.

And sitting with her in the long, low sala, I could not but be aware that the dominant note of the function was also of yesterday. The furniture, though handsome, was antique, the costumes were beautiful, but I marked on more than one *jaqueta* the ravages of moths.

“Ah!” said Magdalena, when I praised the silks and satins and brocades, “they are lovely, yes, but old. *Ay de mi!* old and almost worn out. Do you know, I prefer your sober colours. Look at that man there. All he has is on his back. He has gambled away everything except his grandfather’s clothes.”

I marked the buck with interest. He wore a jacket of green satin with Mexican pesetas for buttons, his waistcoat was of lemon-coloured brocade with gold buttons, the breeches of red velvet, the boots fashioned out of buckskin, bound below the knee with green silk ribbons, and embellished further with tassels from which hung little figures of cats and dogs made of glass beads. His mantle was of sky-blue cloth with a red lining, gallooned with silver and fringed. Would that D’Orsay could have seen him! He wore his hair

in three long braids, but Alvarado and the Dons of quality cut their hair after the European fashion. Some of the young men, however, notably those they called *soldados distinguidos*, had let their forelocks grow. This fashion was *peinado de furia*.

"He is not beggared yet," I remarked.

"And he has his grandfather's ideas, too," continued Magdalena, in her soft voice. "He was a Spaniard, but the grandmother, alas! was an Indita, and when the fine clothes are staked and lost at monte, he will be all Indian again. *Que lastima!*"

Then she fell to praising Letty's colouring, not forgetting, perhaps—for the witch was cunning—her own eyes and hair.

"We must all look like Indios to you, señor," she whispered, with a laugh that belied the words.

"If I should tell you, señorita, how you look to *me*, your cheeks, I'll warrant, would grow redder than my cousin's."

She laughed. "I was warned to beware of you. *Ay de mi!* You are a heretic, señor," and she sighed sweetly.

"Ay," said I, "and I burn already."

"Our sun has kissed your cheeks."

"Not a Californian son," said I in English, for Soto had told me that she had studied our tongue, "but a Californian daughter has wrought the mischief."

"I don't understand," she answered, but she blushed and turned aside her graceful head. "Tell me, did a Castellana teach you to make nice speeches?"

"Perhaps," said I. "I have travelled in Castile, señorita, and the ladies of Spain are——"

"Yes——," she murmured, pouting, "they are the handsomest in the world, you would say."

"The handsomest in the *old* world, señorita."

As we chatted, the *contra-danza*, in which we took no part, was being danced. Curiously enough, the young women remained seated, while the elders—I saw grandmothers on the floor—stood up in two rows, the men facing the women, as we do at home in Sir Roger de Coverley. The music was of the *tempo* of a waltz and the figures were intricate. His Excellency had commanded several pastoral dances: *la jota*, *la bamba*, a most comical performance, wherein the *danseuse* placed on her head a glass of water, and then proceeded to pick up handkerchiefs without a drop being spilled; *el borrego*, a sort of pantomime; and, of course, *el son*. Magdalena Estrada was not called out, obviously at her own desire. The *tecolero*, or master of ceremonies, approached her twice; each time she rose, gave him her small hand, and was then by him turned and reseated.

In a few minutes she dismissed me, but not till I had obtained the promise of a waltz, for she told me that after supper the waltzing would begin, and that the ladies of quality would dance. I made my best bow at parting, and thanked her for the pleasure she had given me.

"Pleasure!" echoed this shameless coquette; "what pleasure have I given to the señor?"

"Pleasure and pain are yours to give," I murmured. "Pleasure comes first, but pain may follow."

"Pain," she whispered, and her voice broke for an instant, "is the common lot, señor; but no pain, I hope, will come to you from me."

As I strolled away Soto touched my arm, and led me outside.

"*Tate, tate!* Have a care," said he lightly. "Forbidden fruit, you know, Don Juan, is——"

"Where is her lover?" I demanded. "Why is he not here? I should like to see him."

"He is good to look at," said the *comisionado*, twirling his black moustachios with an ineffable air, "and rich, ay, rich; and *mi amigo*, Narciso Estrada, the father of Magdalena, loves gold. Not a word, you understand. *Dios!* but the daughter is beautiful."

We drank her health in His Excellency's Madeira, and as we were draining our glasses I marked a big man in a friar's habit, a genuine Friar Tuck.

"Who is that?" said I, nudging Miguel Maria.

"A friend," replied Soto (truly his friends were legion). "You must know him. *Hola!* Padre Quijas, what angel has sent you to Monterey?"

"No angel," replied the good father, coming forward, with a smile upon his jolly face, "but *el Comandante*," and I knew that he was speaking of Vallejo.

My companion kissed the padre's hand, in mockery of course, for that fashion had departed, and inquired tenderly concerning the health of what seemed to me the most robust person I had met in Alta California. Old Mark joined us; he had been dancing, and was very warm and very loquacious, indeed indiscreetly so.

"And what does Vallejo say, Padre José?"

The father shrugged his mighty shoulders. "He says that he is neither centralist, federalist, nor monarchist, but a *ranchero*."

"Jealous of Juanito, his beloved nephew—hey?"

"Perhaps," replied the priest. "We all love power."

"The country was happier and more prosperous under the Mission rule," muttered Jaynes. "I find one hide now where four years ago there were ten. 'Twill take me more than two years to get a cargo."

"You can console yourself meanwhile with a wife," said Miguel Soto. He laughed and left us.

"D——n his impudence!" exclaimed old Mark. "I hate these Mexicans. That fellow would luff into a British frigate, and expect the admiral of the fleet to give him leeway."

"Tell me," said I to the priest, "do you know a friend of Soto's, a Mexican, who came to California with Gutierrez, and obtained a big grant of land, and who——"

"Is engaged to Magdalena Estrada," concluded the padre, with a keen glance at me. "Yes, yes, my son, I know him well. His name is Castañeda, Santiago Castañeda, and the saintliness, i' faith, lies only in his name."

At this our first meeting Quijas spoke mainly of Vallejo and the troublous times. That the padre loved the bottle was indisputable, but where is the man without a failing? Quijas had virtues that outweighed his vice. Jaynes told me that he had been a soldier, a brave and capable one, but on account of a most unfortunate and romantic love affair had been constrained to take orders. He had the confidence of both Vallejo and Alvarado, and was frequently employed by the former to carry despatches from Sonoma, Vallejo's stronghold in the north, to the capital. He certainly had a better understanding of

these complex Californian affairs than any man in the country, with the one brilliant exception of Juan Bautista Alvarado.

Looking back, I make no doubt that 'twas Quijas who either consciously or unconsciously was the cause of my drawing my sword on behalf of the people of the north.

Supper was served at midnight. There was an abundance of beef and chickens, *tamales*, *frijoles*, *tortillas*, *enchiladas*, a very savoury dish, *chiles rellenos* (stuffed peppers), *dulces*, or preserves, some delicious sugared pastry, called *azucarillos*, and plenty of white wine, red wine, and *aguardiente*. Lettice sat beside the Governor, and I found myself next Magdalena, having had the honour of leading her formally to the table. Before being accorded this privilege, an introduction to her father, Narciso Estrada, was indispensable. He was a gaunt, tall, thin-lipped man, hook-nosed as a buzzard, with piercing black eyes set close together beneath grizzled brows. He begged me to visit his rancho near San Luis Obispo.

"'Tis a pity," said he slowly, "that my daughter's future husband, Don Santiago, is not here to meet you."

I bowed ceremoniously.

"He prefers Santa Barbara to Monterey," continued the Don, "and so do I."

At supper Courtenay sat near Magdalena and me. He was in the highest spirits. Already his charming manners had bewitched the half—I need not mention which half—of those present. A stout doña on my left confessed to me that her heart still throbbed

ardently in a body that must have weighed close upon two hundred pounds. "But I love him, señor; *se Dios me perdona*, I love him. Why did Juanito permit him to land? *Ay, ay!* He is beautiful this Valencia. *Ojala!*"

Nothing but a stuffed pepper sealed her lips, and as she gobbled away I could hear her muttering to herself a thousand interjections.

"My aunt Maria Luisa was once a beauty," whispered Magdalena to me. "She has charge of me, you know, but really," and the rogue laughed, "I think it will be my duty to play the dueña."

As the *azucarillos* were being served I spoke of her wedding. She frowned.

"My wedding! *Tate! Quien sabe?* Perhaps I shall die a nun, señor."

"A good many men will have to die first," said I. "A nun, you!"

"But truly," she persisted softly, and the lisping Spanish was sweet as the *azucarillos*; "truly, señor, the peace and repose of a convent have charm for me. Padre Quijas is of my opinion. You know, he once loved a beautiful girl, and consoled himself for her loss in the Zacatecas College. He is a good man, señor, and I'm sorry for him."

"Are you sorry for all who are unfortunate in love?" I asked.

"Yes, señor, for all. It is surely the one thing worth having; and lost, what is left save the consolations of religion?"

She spoke sympathetically, with her liquid eyes gravely confronting me and a pathetic quiver upon her lip.

"Do you know what love is?" I whispered. "You are only seventeen—a child."

"*Santisima!* A child! Many marry at thirteen, señor. I have seen girls of twelve with a baby in their arms. I am no child. And as for love—*hé! hé!* Perhaps I, a child"—I could see that the word had affronted her—"I, who am only seventeen, could teach you what love is, and"—her voice broke for the second time that evening—"and, *ay de mi!* what it is not."

I withheld the obvious and commonplace answer.

"You are offended—no?" she whispered shyly, interpreting my silence amiss.

"Not I, believe me. The truth is, I was thinking of—of Señor Castañeda."

"I, too, am silent when I think of him," she replied gravely; and then we were interrupted by Tia Maria Luisa.

"You eat nothing, nothing," she said to us in mild remonstrance. "You talk, talk, talk all the time. *Dios!* But that is foolish. To talk, when one can eat! *Huy!*" And she drew in her breath sharply between two rows of pretty teeth. I could see that in her youth this stout dueña had been more than comely, and I wondered whether Magdalena would grow like her, and become huge and greedy.

"*Tate!*" whispered the witch. "My mother was a Bandini, and I take after them. Tia Maria is an Estrada."

"Can you read my thoughts, señorita?"

"You have an honest face," she replied, smiling, as she rose from the table. "We are going to be good friends, I am sure."

I danced with her twice after supper, and only once with Lettice, who was besieged by the *caballeros*. Master Courtenay, I noted, was greatly struck by the charms of Magdalena, and when they waltzed together, he so fair, she so dark, both so graceful, a buzz of applause broke from the company, and not a few clapped their hands. It chanced that I was standing beside Alvarado, and he turned to me, smiling.

"Mr. Valence," said he in English, "is a handsome man—too handsome, some of my friends think," and he glanced amusedly at the scowling face of the buck in green satin and red velvet. His Excellency was dressed in a sober dark green frock, with white pantaloons, not *calzoneras*, and he seemed to mark with silent approval my own sober garments.

"You dance, sir?" said I.

He answered quietly, "As you see, my friend, I am slightly lame—a touch of rheumatism. For a Spaniard I dance badly."

"But you make the others dance—well?" I ventured to add. I use the word "ventured" advisedly, for Alvarado, though still a young man, was not one with whom a stranger would dare to be familiar. However, he smiled and seemed pleased.

"Can I see you to-morrow?" he said curtly, for he was no phrase-maker. "To-morrow at one? Yes? That is good. And now oblige me by waltzing with that pretty girl yonder, who looks so invitingly at you. *Caramba!* Blue eyes are in demand to-night!"

As I obeyed, I wondered vaguely what the Governor would say to me on the morrow, and reflected

that it would be a pleasure to serve this Californian, who needed friends and could pipe to their dancing. The times were indeed troublous, as Padre Quijas said, but for my part I was glad of it. Only when my mind dwelt upon Lettice did I feel misgiving, and lament vainly that she was not safe and snug at Cranberry-Orcas.

We danced till four, and then accompanied the ladies to their houses. Returning to my lodging at Thomas Larkin's, I espied a tumbled heap of brown cloth leaning against an adobe wall, and from the heap came a mellow voice, muttering, so it seemed to me, some dog-Latin. It was the good father.

"Padre Quijas," said I, "let me assist you."

"The Lord hath sent you, my son," he replied very soberly. "As you see, my head, which is the best part of me, has not failed me, but my legs are a disgrace to a Christian friar."

I lent him an arm, and escorted him to a quaint little room near the Church of the Presidio. He bubbled over with jests and anecdotes, and recited some verses:—

"O soberano liquor !
Nacido de verdes matas !
Tu me tumbas, tu me matas,
Y—al hombre mejor—
Haces andar a gatas !"

Which, freely translated, means that too much *aguardiente* will turn a priest into a beast.

The good father gave me his blessing before I left him, and assured me solemnly that he had nothing else to bestow.

"But," said he, "to-morrow, my son, you will see one who holds the future in the palm of his hand—El Gobernador, Don Juan Bautista. And I shall see him, too, I shall see him, too," he repeated, wagging his handsome head. "Good-night, my son! Sleep well—and dream of Magdalena."

"Who is betrothed to another," I retorted.

"True, true," muttered the friar. "*Madre de Dios!* I had forgotten that. I forbid you, my son, to dream of her. Good-night."

None the less, the lovely señorita came to me in my sleep, and whispered in my ear that she hated Santiago Castañeda, and wished that he were in heaven. I awoke with a start, and somewhat of a headache.

The sun was high in the heavens—the first quarter of a day destined to be marked by me with red was already spent.

CHAPTER VI.

EL SEÑOR GOBERNADOR—JUAN BAUTISTA ALVARADO.

HIS Excellency received me in a small room, very plainly furnished. In the centre of it stood a handsome mahogany table; upon this were an inkstand, some paper and quill pens, and a rough map of Alta California. The Governor offered me a cigar, lit one himself—he was ever a great smoker—waved me to a chair, sat down, and, fixing his fine, rather melan-

choly eyes upon my face, began to speak slowly in Spanish.

"My friend Larkin tells me that you want land—a grant."

I bowed.

"I should be glad, señor, to give you and your friends as many leagues as you please, for we need just such people—how badly, perhaps I alone know."

He paused as if embarrassed; then he rose from his chair. Later I discovered that Alvarado could never express himself fluently when sitting. A man of action, he loved to talk pacing up and down, emphasising his periods with gestures.

"The Señora Valencia," he said abruptly, "is extraordinarily beautiful, *too* beautiful."

I could not help smiling. Doubtless Alvarado held with Thucydides that the less that is seen and heard of a woman the better. I explained to him that Courtenay owned a small interest in the cargo of the *Heron*, and that, for the present, he would accompany Jaynes upon his trips up and down the coast.

"Jaynes sails for Santa Barbara within a few days. It is certain that your friends go with him?"

"Quite certain, your Excellency."

He shrugged his shoulders. Then he said, quietly: "My signature to a deed at this moment might be called in question hereafter. Carlos Carrillo is the Governor of Alta California to-day."

"But to-morrow, señor——?"

"To-morrow. Ah! *Mañana—quien sabe?*"

"One may guess," said I.

"Tut!" said Alvarado, smiling. "Fortune is fickle.

See here, señor, you are a young man—so am I; neither of us can afford to make mistakes. I will be entirely frank with you, for you are honest and can serve me—if you will? I expect Castro any minute. He was at San José last night; he will be here this morning. I have just learned that nothing can prevent war. Castro will march south at once, and I shall follow. Meantime I must find a friend”—he emphasised the word friend—“who will accompany Father Quijas to my uncle’s house at Sonoma, and confer with him at length upon the situation. None will suspect the nature of your mission. You will bring me a message from my uncle—a verbal message. You perceive, señor, that I trust you.”

Now a minute before I had no intention of pledging myself. Yet his question demanded an answer, and on that answer depended much, so much, indeed, that an older and wiser man would surely have hesitated. I was then (as now) a hero-worshipper. So I replied boldly: “Your Excellency can command me.”

He eyed me keenly.

“Have you talked with Soto, señor?”

“He has talked to me,” I replied.

“Ah! he is a fox, a coyote. We have many coyotes in Alta California.”

At this moment Castro clanked into the room, and was warmly greeted by the Governor. He was considered at that time to be the handsomest and strongest man north of Point Conception. Lacking the breeding of Alvarado, he looked every inch a soldier: a soldier of fortune, perhaps, rough and ready, prepared to fight, drink or make love to a pretty woman at an instant’s

notice. He was very tall, very broad, and very dark. Beneath his curling black moustachios were a pair of red sensual lips. The chin was square and massive. The brows overhung large finely-formed eyes. The neck was the neck of a gladiator. He glanced at me somewhat superciliously, but Alvarado introduced me and added kindly: "You can speak freely. This gentleman is my friend."

"Then he is the friend of José Castro. When we have taught these dogs of abajeños a lesson I shall be at your service, señor. What news, Bautista?"

"Estudillo has sent Pio Pico, with men and ammunition, from San Diego to Los Angeles."

Castro's great laugh rang out.

"Pio Pico! *Ah, que necio!*"

Then he turned to me familiarly and took my arm.

"Caballero," he said, still laughing immoderately, "I must tell you a story about Pio Pico. It was when he was head of the Diputacion——"

"José," said Alvarado, in a tone that enforced obedience, "no stories, please; another time, not now. Tell me, when can you march for the South?"

"In half-an-hour, if the Señor Gobernador commands."

"We must wait a little—till we hear from uncle"—he always spoke of Vallejo as uncle; Carrillo was his cousin. "When will it be convenient for you, señor, to leave Monterey?"

"In half-an-hour," said I, repeating Castro's words, "if the Señor Gobernador commands."

Castro laughed again.

"*Dios!* You have faithful servants."

"I have friends—and enemies," replied Alvarado thoughtfully. "To-morrow, señor, you and Father Quijas will take the road."

I bowed, and turned to leave.

"Santiago Castañeda is here," said Castro carelessly. "His cousin Juan will occupy San Buenaventura" (one of the southern ports). "Can we depend on Santiago?"

Alvarado's deep voice reached my ears as I walked down the corridor: "His ranchos are in the north, and Magdalena is here."

At the mention of the girl's name my heart began to beat. Already, before I had clapped eyes on him, I hated the Mexican. However, for the moment I was concerned with other matters. Why had Alvarado chosen me—a stranger—as the bearer of despatches? Vanity furnished an obvious, but not an adequate, reason. Why, too, had he concerned himself with Letty's departure?

I confess that these questions troubled me but little. At last I had found a captain under whose banner I was eager to serve, and the services he might require of me whetted no apprehension. So I whistled as I crossed the plaza with its half-dozen cannons mounted on rotting carriages, and the tune that I whistled was "Malbrouk s'en va t'en guerre."

Both Letty and Courtenay—who were lodging not far from the Presidio—eyed me queerly when I told them that I was about to take the northern road. Courtenay laughed, and said, with meaning, that he was glad to hear it. Presently he left the room, and

then Letty spoke nervously: "Dear John, you won't take any words of mine amiss?"

"Good Lord," said I, "what have I done?"

"Nothing—yet."

The pretty creature was blushing, and my own cheeks were redder than usual.

"You were never a flirt, John."

"No," said I, rather sourly.

"And you are not going to begin now, are you?"

Was she jealous? I asked myself. Who can fathom a woman's heart? I confess that my cheeks were red with anger, not with confusion. What right had she and Courtenay to indict me?

"I don't like Magdalena Estrada," she continued nervously. "She is engaged to marry another man, and yet last night 'twas plain that she had eyes only for you."

"Because the other was not there," I retorted.

"If you really thought that was the reason, you wouldn't give it."

This shaft hit the white.

"You are right. She cares nothing for the Mexican."

"Ah!" she sighed, "do not be angry with me, dear John."

"I should think," said I hotly, "that her condition would appeal to you; the child is being forced through political reasons into a detestable marriage."

"Detestable? I hear that her lover is charming."

"Many women have thought so, but not Magdalena."

"I have put your back up, John. Yet I spoke in your interest. Forgive me. Here is Courtenay."

My foster-brother asked for details concerning my

interview with Alvarado, and his eye sparkled when I said that war had been practically declared.

"Egad!" said he; "I should like to take a hand in this quarrel myself."

"No, no!" cried timid Letty.

I told the hot head that I had reason to believe that His Excellency would be in a position to grant us many leagues of good land before the year was out.

"I'm not so sure of that," he replied. "He may not have more than six cubic feet of his own twelve months hence."

This speech was not to my liking, but I said nothing, and presently we walked together to a picnic where I found Tia Maria Luisa, and by her side the fascinating niece. The aunt pointed out to me a dashing horseman, who was about to engage in the "colear," the tailing of a bull, and before she whispered his name instinct told me that I was looking upon Santiago Castañeda. He had a fine figure and a comely face, and he rode as only those who are cradled in the saddle can ride. We sat outside a large stone corral. In the centre of it was a young bull; at opposite sides were Soto and Castañeda. Don Miguel, I noted, anxious to distinguish himself in the eyes of the Montereyenas, was playing pranks that aroused hoarse cries of admiration from the crowd of Indians and Mestizos. He vaulted on and off his horse, a big sorrel gelding, or he would lean out of the saddle as he galloped round the corral, picking up handfuls of dust that he flung into the faces of the brown-skinned boys upon the top of the wall. Magdalena's lovely eyes were sparkling.

"Ay," she murmured. "He is a caballero indeed."

Just then, at a word from Alvarado, who was riding with Narciso Estrada, two panels of the big gate were taken down, leaving an opening wide enough to permit the passage of the bull and the two horsemen. The rules of the game forbade either man to reach for the tail till abreast of the opening, and the bull must be thrown within sixty feet of the corral. When the bull saw the pastures beyond it bolted, tail up, for liberty and a meal, and the men raced after it, one on each side: positions previously determined—so Magdalena informed me—by the drawing of straws. Soto, drawing the shorter straw, was on the right of the bull, and therefore at a disadvantage, being constrained to tail the bull with his left hand. The opening was so small that it seemed to us a miracle that the three got through without a smash; but as they shot out of the dust of the ring into the clearer atmosphere beyond, 'twas seen that Soto had the tail. With a twist of the wrist he placed it beneath his left knee. Then, slightly turning his horse, he threw the big beast, and in a second was afoot beside it, the *pella*, a piece of soft, raw hide some seven feet long, in hand. With incredible deftness he bound the bull's legs so that it could not rise, and as he bowed to the crowd, *à la espada*, a hoarse shout broke from every Latin throat, and you may be sure that the Anglo-Saxons were not dumb.

“*Virgen Santisima!*” exclaimed Magdalena. She was watching Castañeda, who, because he had failed, was ill-treating his horse; jerking its bleeding mouth with the monstrous bit that Spaniards use, and spurring it cruelly upon flanks and shoulders. I watched her curiously, knowing that cruelty to animals is not

an unpardonable sin in the opinion of Latin women. Then her glance met mine, and her lips quivered with feeling. Was it pity for the horse or for herself?

When the Mexican joined us a few minutes later, Magdalena received him but coldly, and my own face was sour as I bowed in reply to his greeting. I marked his thin curling lips, his harsh and metallic laugh, the laugh of the man who laughs at and not with his friends. Meantime, Letty, as usual, was the centre of a crowd of Montereyenas, and I could see Castañeda's quick upward twist of the eyebrows when his glance rested upon her fair face. Then the blood rushed into his pale cheeks.

"Who is that?" he asked abruptly. "*Dios!* 'Tis the Englishwoman of whom they rave."

So speaking, without a word of courtesy to either Magdalena or me, he turned his back upon us, and walked straight into the middle of the group. I saw him touch the arm of a dandy in green and silver; the chatter died down; Castañeda advanced; the introduction was made; the customary phrase followed: "At your feet, señora."

The words have ordinarily no significance. And yet there lay behind them an impassioned avowal. The men lounging near exchanged smiles. Magdalena laughed.

"You look so fierce, señor," she whispered.

"A thousand pardons."

"Nay—it becomes you," she answered, smiling.

"I go north to-morrow," I said abruptly.

It seemed to me that a shadow flitted into her expressive eyes.

"*Ojala!* you are plotting too—no? señor. I ask you to betray no confidence. Of course you go to the *comandante*. Well, I—I wish that I were riding with you."

"I wish to Heaven you were," I replied fervently.

"We will take care of your friends, but they are so popular already——"

She shrugged her shoulders as I explained that the *Heron* was about to weigh anchor for Santa Barbara, and raised her arched brows with a comical side glance at Master Courtenay,

Truly that youth, who had seen no ladies save his wife for nearly five months, was making up for lost time. I wondered vaguely if Lettice were jealous. Courtenay's face was so expressive, and he could turn a compliment so glibly, that my mind misgave me. I saw that his wife's eyes were a-sparkle as she listened to the exuberant nonsense of Castañeda, and that her brows contracted when she glanced at her debonair husband. Her cheeks, too, glowed with a deeper colour than the occasion warranted.

"They are all her slaves," sighed Magdalena.

"Yes," said I, with a shameless lack of tact, and—may be—a sigh. My pretty companion eyed me sharply.

"You envy her husband—no?"

This insinuating "no" was accompanied by a sly droop of the eyelids. And I fear I blushed, for Magdalena laughed very softly.

"*Ay de mi!* You are one of the unfortunates?"

"Not I, señorita. I envy no man when I am sitting beside you."

"You say so. Ah, but——"

The Spanish trick of completing a sentence with the eyes has amazing witchery.

"I say it, and I mean it, dear señorita."

Lest the reader should accuse me of inveracity, I hasten to add that I did mean it. The child, for so I regarded her, had excited in me the warmest interest and pity.

Magdalena blushed beneath my eyes, and looked uneasily at Castañeda.

"*Ojala!*" she murmured. "You are much too bold."

Possibly others thought so too, for the good aunt played the dueña, and not another word save "adios" did I exchange with Magdalena. Presently I took my leave and hunted up Quijas, who was busy with preparations for our journey. He begged me to leave everything to him, and showed me a huge saddle and accoutrements set aside for my use. One of the officers gave me a *cuera de gamuza*, a sort of sack coat made of many thicknesses of antelope's skin, thick enough to turn a sabre cut, and some *armitas*, which covered the thighs and were quite waterproof. A cavalry soldier's carbine was offered me, but I refused it, saying that my sword and pistols would surely prove sufficient.

"Besides," said I to Quijas, "we are not going to war, but on a friendly visit to Vallejo."

"'Tis well to be prepared," said the jolly priest. "We might come across some Indians; they are giving the *comandante* a deal of trouble. Can you use a sword, my son?"

"Tolerably well," said I; and the talk falling upon

weapons, he took me into a rough guard-room, and discoursed volubly upon schools and methods of fence. Soto was present and an *alférez* of the Presidio, who was loud in praise of the sabre. Some foils were hung upon the wall, but the lieutenant said they were rarely used by Californians. As we chatted, Castañeda and Courtenay entered, and the former was effusively greeted by Don Miguel; the *alférez*, I perceived, bowed coldly, and shortly after bade us good-evening, pleading duty as an excuse for leaving us.

"Senor Castañeda," said Soto to me, "is expert with the foils. Will you try a bout, gentlemen?"

The sneer upon the Mexican's face annoyed me.

"If the señor will give me a lesson," said I, "I shall be most grateful."

The light was failing, but Castañeda bowed politely, and in less than five minutes we were hard at it. He fenced well after the Spanish fashion, whereas I had been trained by Angelo in the modern French school—in a word, I had him at my mercy. When I had touched him several times, he flung down his foil and called for sabres, and once more we faced each other. I saw that he was angry and mortified, and, perhaps, being a very young man, I showed my sense of superiority too plainly. However, with the change of weapons I soon discovered that the Don was at least my equal, if not my master. Three times in succession he touched me on the arm, using a peculiar feint followed by a flicking cut very difficult to parry. As the light grew worse every minute, I bowed and expressed myself satisfied.

"The honours," said Courtenay, "are even."

Castañeda complimented me on my skill, and I followed suit. Then he and Soto strolled away.

"He can beat you with the sabre," said Courtenay.

"Not he," said Father Quijas. "I can teach you to guard that cut. Quick, before it is dark."

The padre stripped off his frock, and picked up the sabre as if he loved it. I remembered that he had been in his youth a *soldado distinguido*.

"There!" he cried. "See—a mere trick, a turn of the wrist; drop your point—so! Again. That is better. Not so stiff! Once more. Ha, ha! Don Santiago is now your inferior, but don't let him know it."

The good padre laid down his weapon with a sigh, and confessed to a consuming thirst.

"For my sins last night," said he, "not a drop to-day has passed my lips, but come with me and we will crack a bottle of Frontignac that a friend sent me. The thought of it has tormented me since sunrise."

So we strolled to the priest's cell and finished the bottle that had come, indeed, out of the hold of the *Heron*. Quijas said that Alvarado had spoken of me most handsomely, and commended me warmly to his uncle in a letter that, even now, lay against the friar's broad chest.

"Your fortune is made, my son," said he. "Alvarado will die, perhaps, a poor man, but he will see to it that his friends become rich. *Caramba!* not a drop is left of the good French wine."

Courtenay said that he could hunt up old Mark, and find another bottle and another friend. This we did, and then went aboard for my pistols, that were

vastly admired by Quijas. Jaynes added to our kit a big case bottle of cognac, and bade me take charge of it. I knew that the sly rascal was desperately anxious to renew acquaintance with the fair Barbareña, the cousin of Mrs. Ben Buston, with a cultivated taste for ancient mariners. We rallied him upon the subject of matrimony, and Father Quijas undertook at a more fitting time to baptize a most unregenerate sinner—an offer peremptorily declined.

“Juanito,” said old Mark, who called Alvarado to his face Señor Gobernador, “will grant me a dispensation.”

Father Quijas frowned, and for the first time I had a taste of his quality as a priest.

“My friend,” he said gravely, “you have touched upon a serious matter. His Excellency has been under the ban of Holy Church ('twas for reading *Télémaque* when a youth), and he will not lightly offend again. A marriage between a heretic and a Catholic is no marriage—in my eyes.”

He spoke soberly, in a heavy, mule-like fashion, but with obvious sincerity, and then Courtenay led the talk into a smoother channel. Meantime, I was considering how I could get speech with Magdalena. Quijas and I were under orders to leave Monterey at daybreak. Magdalena, so to speak, was under lock and key. I dared not visit her again, and if I did so I should infallibly fall foul of the Mexican. But see her I must and would.

Courtenay returned to the Presidio to sup with his wife, while Quijas, Jaynes, and I walked together to Larkin's. Here we found Castro and some roystering

boon companions of his, great eaters and heavy drinkers. They welcomed Quijas uproariously.

"Ho, ho! Padre Quijas; wilt thou lay us all beneath the table, as thou didst the last time we supped with thee?"

"An empty head holds liquor," retorted the friar. "Hadst thou brains, my son, in that headpiece of thine, the *aguardiente* would not so easily get possession."

I then saw plainly that Castro and his friends were about to make a wet night of it, so as soon as supper was over, and not without protest, you may be sure, I went my way, having agreed with Quijas to meet him at daybreak in the plaza.

"Caballero!" shouted Castro, "I'll wager a hundred steers that you are taking that sober face to a *señorita*."

"You would lose the bet," I returned carelessly. "I have to say adieu to the Señora Valence."

"I'm sorry for you then," replied the big soldier. "I pity the man who has to take leave of the handsomest woman in Alta California."

When I found myself outside, the first thing I marked was the thickness of the fog that had floated in from the Pacific. The moon had not yet risen, and 'twas dark as pitch—none too dark, however, for my purpose. I wore a sombrero of vicuña and a heavy *manga*, and knew that I would pass for a Spaniard at a pinch. There were few men abroad as I skirted the wall of the Presidio and ascended the slope that led to the house where Courtenay lodged. The soldiers were singing over their cups, and from the ocean came the boom of the big combers as they broke with thundering salvos upon the shore.

I found Lettice diligently sewing, and to my amazement Castañeda was at her side. His presence there, dancing attendance upon a married woman, was, I knew, contrary to etiquette; but he looked a man who would ride rough-shod over the Decalogue itself, but I heard him say presently that the Estradas had pleaded fatigue as an excuse for dismissing him early.

"Is a guest in California ever dismissed?" said the innocent Lettice.

"He dismisses himself, señora, when he sees that his presence is no longer desired."

He sneered openly, and I suspected that Magdalena had afforded her betrothed but sorry entertainment. 'Twas plain that he found favour in the eyes of Lettice, for she entreated him to sing sentimental ditties, and he warbled as sweetly as a sucking dove for nearly half-an-hour. I told Courtenay to keep an eye upon him, but he laughed at me, and asked what mischief I apprehended. Having no answer pat, I replied confusedly that the fellow's face was a danger-signal; and then Courtenay swore that he liked the man vastly well, and hoped to spend many pleasant hours in his company. I told him bluntly that a man's meat might prove a woman's poison, and he retorted that I was a stupid old ass, or words to that effect. It was on my lips to beg him earnestly to be guarded in his intercourse with these languishing southern beauties, and to remember that a wife's jealousy is quickly inflamed and not so quickly extinguished, but I feared that he would take such counsel amiss.

When I bade Letty good-bye she held tightly my hand. "Dear John," she whispered, "I shall miss

your kind face. Must you really leave us? I—I dread somehow the days that I must pass without you. God bless you, dear cousin."

I kissed her cheek and laughed at her fears. Since, I have learned to respect a woman's instinct, that amazing sixth sense withheld from men.

The time was now ripe for my adventure, and as I stepped again into the murky fog I wondered how it would end. By chance I knew that Magdalena slept in a small chamber adjoining her aunt's bedroom and beyond it. The closet—for it was nothing more—had a small window, heavily barred, that looked upon the road, but no door save the one that led into the dueña's chamber. The house was distant a couple of cable-lengths from where I stood, and between it and me lay a deep gulch, that might prove a sanctuary in an hour of need. Seeing no passengers on the road, I set nimbly forth, with my sombrero pulled down about my ears and my cape drawn tight across my chin. A light glimmered in the señorita's window, but the rest of the house was black as ink against the dark grey sky. I felt like Peeping Tom of Coventry as I sneaked up to the illumined pane and peered within. The child was half undressed and sitting upon her bed; her small hands were crossed upon her petticoat: her pensive face was framed in two glorious braids of black hair that fell below her slender waist; her attitude and the pathetic droop of her mouth indicated distress tempered by resignation. It seemed an infamy to look upon her, but for my life I could not turn aside my eyes. Then, as I gazed

pityingly—swearing to myself that if she needed a champion one was ready to risk his life on her behalf—she suddenly fell upon her knees, and uplifted her hands in a passion of supplication. I could not doubt that she was beseeching Heaven to send her a friend, and I vowed to accept the trust that God himself seemed to have placed in me—John Charity.

I waited till she rose from her knees, and then tapped gently upon the glass. In an instant she had caught up a rebozo, and entwined it around her head and shoulders; then she approached the window on tiptoe, and her eyes stared steadily into mine. Without hesitation she opened the casement and placed her graceful head close to the iron bars. “Why have you come to me?” she whispered.

“Can you ask?” said I. “God has sent you a friend; here he is.”

“*Madre de Dios*,” she sighed, “thou hast heard my prayers. I thank thee!”

CHAPTER VII.

I FIND MYSELF IN A PECK OF TROUBLES.

HAVING returned thanks to Our Lady of Sorrows, Magdalena vouchsafed me a brilliant smile, and pushed through the bars her hand, which I devoutly kissed. I was standing on the public highway, but not a soul was stirring either within or without the house. My heart, I confess, beat the devil's tattoo. It seemed that something more than mere chance had brought a friend that night to Magdalena Estrada.

She wasted no precious seconds in coquetry.

"Heaven has sent you," she murmured, "to save me from a hateful marriage with Señor de Castañeda."

She gave him the particle, to which, I believe, he was entitled, though few used it, and the formality emphasised her dislike of the man.

"I am at your service," said I warmly.

"I dare not appeal to Alvarado," she continued. "It is most important that my father and his friends should be conciliated. A small cause of provocation would rank them with the abajeños. You see we are all connected by blood and marriage."

"I understand," said I.

"But Vallejo, they say, will not mix himself up with these factions. He is a gallant gentleman, always prepared to espouse the cause of the weak. Señor, you must tell him from me that I cannot wed this Mexican. I cannot, I cannot! Not to please ten thousand fathers, not for all the land in California. I would sooner, if the worst comes to the worst, enter a convent. Will you tell him this, señor, and bring me back his answer? One word from him to my father will suffice to at least postpone this horrible wedding. I could go to Sonoma till the times mend. Then, when Alvarado's position is assured, I can trust him to help me. Meantime, some pretext must be found for delay. Don Santiago asked my father to-night to name an early day. Thank Heaven, Lent is close at hand; we must wait in any case till Easter; and Vallejo hates the Mexicans; he is a true Californian."

She spoke so rapidly that I followed the words with difficulty.

"I tried to see Father Quijas, but they kept him from me. Oh! they know that I am desperate. And they even suspect you, señor. My aunt scolded me well for—for being so forward, so unmaidenly," she said.

I caught her hand and kissed it again, not quite so devoutly. The answer seemed satisfactory.

"Give Vallejo this ring, señor; it belonged to my dead mother, his first cousin, and ask him for her sake to interfere. I think—I hope that he will."

"By God," said I, "if he doesn't, I will!"

My confidence seemed to impress her.

"That is all," she murmured. "How can I thank you? What can I do or say?"

She looked wistfully at me, the pretty child, as if she would fain leave her prison. I thrust my arm past the barriers and clasped her round the waist. I swear solemnly 'twas but to comfort her. A strong arm tells its own story to the weak. Then her head drooped towards me, and we kissed each other through the bars. As her lips clung to mine, the scales fell from my eyes, and I knew that she loved me with the passion of youth. I have never played the dog in the manger. I believed that Providence had sent this loving soul to comfort me, so I swore to comfort her, and you may be sure that I succeeded. I had known her but a week, some cold-blooded Saxon may say. And what of it? Her trust in a stranger would have fired a wiser and cooler head. Her kisses would have provoked kisses from a graven image.

"But Juanito, *querido*," she whispered presently, "this seems to have complicated matters."

"Not at all," I replied promptly. "On the contrary

'tis now simple as A B C. Come weal or woe, I am bound to you, and you to me."

A fatuous solution of a problem, but it pleased Magdalena mightily.

"That is true. We are bound, you and I. *Ah, Dolor!* you are a heretic."

I waited, with a queer feeling in my throat. Then she dropped the formal "usted," and murmured softly:

"I love thee—I love thee—I love thee!"

Those confounded bars were as hard and cold as that proverbial Charity to which I trust I am an exception. But they served to remind me that other barriers lay between this loving creature and a poor yeoman's son—prejudice, avarice, ambition, superstition. Yet these difficulties whetted rather than blunted my determination to overcome them. The Alps had been crossed before.

Before we parted Magdalena gave me a tress of her hair, and snipped a yellow lock from my temples, that she swore would lie in her bosom. Then the jealous witch asked me point-blank if there had been love-passages between me and another. And I confess that I was tempted sorely to lie to her. Being a son of Adam I foolishly evaded the question.

"There is not a woman in England," I replied, "whose eyes are wet for me, save my dear mother."

"But the Señora Valence?"

"I have kissed her a thousand times. We were brought up together. She is my cousin. I have been a diligent student, *querida*, with eyes glued to my books."

"A student—thou, *Bueno!* For the future thou must look at *me.*"

I vowed that my eyes should prove her faithful servants. Then in turn I asked if she had lived heart-whole for seventeen years.

"I used to tell the girls, Juanito, that I would surely marry a man with blue eyes and yellow hair; a man with a white skin and a white heart; a strong man, *querido*, as thou art, brave and clever. But," she sighed prettily, "I really thought thou wouldst never come to me. *Santisima!* my aunt has heard us!"

I could hear that stout dame rolling uneasily upon an ancient bed which creaked with almost human infirmity. Magdalena pointed expressively down the road, and silently closed the casement. I fled to the friendly gulch, and lay snug for some five minutes; then the casement opened again, and I cautiously stole up. Tia Maria Luisa was snoring blissfully, the alarm had proved a false one. Magdalena, however, was shivering with fright, so we kissed again and again—and parted.

Now common-sense, not to mention fatigue, ought to have steered me straight to my lodging; but excitement had banished sleep, and I felt in the mood for a stroll. The moon had risen, and now shone palely through the mist. The fog was less thick. So, wrapping my mantle about me, I walked on up the road, and away from the town. My heart was still beating an infernal tattoo, but my head grew cooler, and I reflected soberly that in truth I was up to

my ears in a very pretty pickle, and like to be well salted before I was out of it. Nor could I take counsel of any man, saving, perhaps, Father Quijas, who knew that I was a heretic, and no fit mate for a true believer. Weighing the matter, I made certain that Alvarado would prove *my* friend, when, *bien entendu*, I had proven myself *his*. And I looked forward to meeting the *comandante*, Vallejo, who was a power in the land, and a gallant, courtly gentleman to boot. But the future, study it as I might, was as misty as the moon above me, though illumined by the light of love.

Now adventures, so often a synonym for troubles, come in battalions. I had had, God knows, enough excitement for one night; but the Fates held me in their toils, and were minded to play the spider to my fly, for I soon found myself in a most unhappy position—a tangled web—from whence, squirm as I might, I dared not extricate myself for fear of ensnaring two others—my master Alvarado, and my sweet mistress, Magdalena. In a word, sorely against my will, I was forced to undertake the dishonourable *rôle* of eavesdropper and spy.

I was passing on my return Estrada's house, loitering, in truth, beneath my lady's window—what fools we mortals be!—and hoping to steal another kiss before seeking my lodging. The window was shut, however, and the taper had been extinguished, so I scratched lightly on the pane, and waited—not for long. Magdalena I knew would sleep but little that night. She heard the signal and unfastened the casement. But our lips had scarce met when the sound

of voices floated up the road, and for the second time I fled into the gulch. From behind the shelter of a sage-brush I could just see two men, but 'twas impossible to distinguish their faces. And speaking as they did in Spanish, very softly and quickly, I could not swear that I knew them, although the voice of one reminded me strongly of Soto.

"Is it certain," said one, the taller of the two, "is it certain that Bustamente" (the Mexican President) "will support Alvarado?"

"He will support the party in power."

"Well, what chance has Carrillo against Bautista? Not one. Yet Carrillo would prove a more generous friend."

"My friend, who knows, Bautista may not live to welcome the Comisionado."

The speaker laughed significantly, and then the pair fell to whispering; but strain my ears as I might, I could catch nothing but disjointed words—words, however, of damnable import. 'Twas plain that these were conspirators, ready to sell themselves to the highest bidder, trusting neither God nor man, tossed hither and thither by windy fears, buzzards scenting carrion.

Presently they flitted away, and I crawled from the gulch and regained the town. I deemed it of importance to see Alvarado and warn him. Father Quijas had told me that the Governor was a burner of midnight oil, a student of ancient and modern history, and 'twas not yet eleven by my watch. But how to obtain an interview at such an unseasonable hour baffled my wits. Here again, however, fortune stood my friend. I dared not face the questions and raillery of Castro,

or else I had marched straight to Quijas, and left to him the solution of the problem. Nor could I get word to Thomas Larkin. Torn by misgiving, I turned the corner of the Presidio wall, and blundered into the arms of a foot-passenger. He cursed me roundly in vile Spanish, and I recognised the voice of a friend, an American, the only doctor in Monterey, the best of good fellows.

"Is that you, Pearson?" said I.

"It's what's left of me," he replied. "Confound it, man, you've stove in my bulkheads. Where the deuce are you going in such a desperate hurry?"

"And where are you going?" I retorted. "Come with me, and I'll give you a sip of cognac—not your *aguardiente de trigo*, but the genuine medicine."

"I'm on duty," said Pearson. "You needn't mention it, but the Governor has sent for me. He's a mighty sick man, let me tell you, though he doesn't show it. He has a Spartan's pluck, that chap, but rheumatism will lay him by the heels if he isn't careful. Good night."

I persuaded him to take me with him, not without argument, for Alvarado, it seemed, had a morbid dread of publishing his infirmity. Together we entered the Governor's house, and were ushered into the same room, whose simple furnishings were an epitome of the owner's life and character. His Excellency was reading, and the volume that engrossed his attention was Cicero's famous essay on friendship. He looked up as we crossed the threshold, and smiled courteously, though his handsome face was seamed with pain. I hastened to explain that business of importance justified my presence, and he begged me to sit down.

"I sent for you," he said to Pearson, "because my knee is worse to-night. Have you brought the liniment. You have. Good. I will apply it myself. If I have inconvenienced you, forgive me."

His consideration for the comfort of others touched me. It is in such matters that men manifest their quality. Pearson bowed and withdrew, and in less than two minutes I had told Alvarado what I knew. He nodded gravely.

"Yes," he said slowly, "most of my friends are pendulums. I have known that for a long time," and he sighed.

Then he looked at me with his queer enigmatical smile, the smile of the man who holds the key that unlocks the closets where men's skeletons are laid away. Beneath this steadfast gaze my cheek flushed.

"You know Magdalena Estrada?" he said abruptly.

"I have that honour," I murmured. "Your Excellency presented me to the señorita."

"So I did," he muttered, "so I did. The blame be on my head. You find her charming—no?"

"I have found all the señoritas charming," I replied evasively.

A question, I could see, was in his eyes, but he denied it utterance. Doubtless he wondered what had led me to Estrada's house. I tried to throw dust in those inquisitive orbs.

"I wished to bid my friends good-bye," I said carelessly.

"Just so."

Racked as he must have been by pain, his lips flickered with humour. 'Twas not hard to guess that

the good aunt had made free with my name, and suddenly, like a flash of summer lightning, this thought illumined obscurity. Was this mission to Vallejo an excuse for separating Magdalena and me? It seemed more than likely.

He unlocked a cabinet, and took from it a decanter of sherry and some fine, thin-stemmed glasses. I don't think he knew that sherry is poison to a rheumatic man, for he filled the glasses to the brim and tendered me one.

"I drink to—California," he said, and, clinking our glasses, we emptied them in silence.

I confess that I was perplexed, and to turn the conversation picked up the Cicero and asked my host if he admired the orator and his philosophy.

"I read Latin with difficulty," said he, sitting beside me. "Can you construe this passage for me?"

I did so.

"Do you read Greek?" he asked.

Upon my answering in the affirmative, he said that he regretted an early lack of education more than anything else. He told me of the few books that he and Vallejo had read together—Chateaubriand, *Gil Blas*, Buffon, a volume of Rousseau, and some histories. He added modestly that he was self-taught, and I paid him no idle compliment when I replied that he had had an excellent tutor. He spoke with ardour of the pleasures of systematic study, of the joys that temper mental labour, of the delight in acquiring stores of knowledge.

"Ignorance will ruin us," he said sadly. "We think of nothing but eating and drinking—and making love,"

he added slyly. "You have been but ten days in Monterey, but you must see how it is with us. Some of my friends, men of breeding too, can hardly read and write. I could mention a dozen, a dozen who sign their names with a *rubrica*! *Dios*! But it maddens me! And this country, so rich, so beautiful—what will become of it? Ah! if I dared speak, if I could tell you what I see, if——" He paused and wiped the perspiration from his forehead. Then he laughed bitterly, and held out his hand.

"Forgive me, señor; I am keeping a tired man from his bed, and to-morrow you must ride far and fast. *Buenas noches*."

I rose and clasped his hand.

"You count me your friend?" he said.

"I count myself your grateful servant, Señor Gobernador," and with that I left him.

CHAPTER VIII.

SAN FRANCISCO SOLANO.

FATHER QUIJAS and I, with two vaqueros in charge of the horses, left the plaza of Monterey as the sun tipped with madder the peaks of the Gabilan Range. We galloped ahead, while the vaqueros followed, one of them leading the bell-mare, whom the other horses *always* kept in sight. Quijas told me that in this fashion distance was discounted. Nothing so tires a rider as a weary mount. When a horse flagged (we rode at a hand gallop) a vaquero caught and

saddled a fresh one, and the jaded beast joined the *caballada* behind. We had five-and-twenty mounts in our string.

My baggage—a change of clothes and other articles—was packed in a *maleta*, an oblong sack, with the opening in the middle, that was fastened securely with raw hide to the crupper of my big saddle. We carried no food, counting upon the hospitality of the missions and ranchos *en route*, and although the fare set before us was often of the plainest and coarsest, yet it never lacked the sauce of a hearty welcome.

Through what a smiling landscape we passed! Abundant rains had spread a mantle of tender green upon the hills, and the valleys were lush with grasses—alfileria, clover, and malva. I never had seen so many wild-flowers, not even in the water meadows that skirt the Itchen when the daffodils and cowslips are in bloom. We came upon acres of golden poppies, what they now call *eschscholtzias*, and Quijas told me that later the same ground would blaze with larkspur and yellow violets. As we rode on the country grew more beautiful, more thickly wooded with both live and white oaks. It reminded me of the park at Cranberry-Orcas. He stood the same ancient trees, some of them slightly warped from the perpendicular, leaning toward the south, bent—so I learned from Quijas—beneath the kiss of the strong trade wind; here were gently rolling hills, round as the breasts of a woman; here, too, were fairy glades, beloved by the black-tail deer; rabbits and hares scampered away to our right and left; bevvies of quail whirled up from beneath our horses' hoofs; doves cooed from

the branches of the pines. Presently we skirted a vast marsh, and far out in the pools of water I could see flocks of ducks, widgeon, mallard, and teal, with here and there long lines of white and grey geese, and more than one wild swan, whose dazzling plumage can never be mistaken. Quijas showed me fresh bear-tracks in the dust of the road—tracks like a giant's foot—the spoor of the grizzly *Ursus horribilis*. He promised me that I should see one of these monsters lassoed, or, if I pleased, stake my skill with a rifle against his strength. 'Twas a sportsman's paradise!

I believe that no Englishman has a greater love of England than I—'tis the heritage of every yeoman; but on this spring morning I confessed to the burly friar that not even my dear Hampshire could be compared with this sweet, virginal California. For she lay before me in all her glowing beauty, fresh from the hand of God, untouched as yet by man, immaculate. And then I began to dimly understand the feelings of Alvarado, that cool, slow-speaking Spaniard, who could see, as in a nightmare, this precious gem slipping from his grasp. What wonder that the sweat bedewed his brow!

The good padre had a very perfect gift of silence. Perhaps he was reflecting that this pearl of price had been filched from the bosom of his Church, and that the sweet music of the mission bells was now jangled and out of tune. I have since learned that the fat acres that lay round the missions were deeded to the padres on trust, so to speak, and not as a permanent possession. Later Alvarado explained the matter to me; but the priests, who had laboured faith-

fully and well, evolving order out of chaos, thought otherwise.

Upon this first day Quijas was in the mood to try my mettle as a horseman, and we rode a hundred miles. The missions in Alta California are about fifty miles apart, and were used as stopping-places. Those travelling leisurely rode fifty miles a day, those in a hurry a hundred. I had ridden regularly since we dropped anchor in Monterey Bay, but I confess that I was sore and tired when we drew rein at the San José Mission. Here the number of buildings, corrals, and the like amazed me. Quijas pronounced it to be the most prosperous of the Californian missions, on account of the superb soil of the Santa Clara Valley, now famous all over the civilised world.

"The Church," said he, as I expressed my admiration of what had been accomplished, "is the greatest organisation in the world, and she has shown even in California what she can do. Now," and he smiled sarcastically, "it is the turn of the State. We will see how quickly she can cut our stitches."

"Those in charge," I replied warmly, "will be sure to guard such valuable properties."

"*Quis custodiet custodes?*" he answered, smiling; and I murmured the name of Alvarado. Quijas nodded, admitting curtly that His Excellency was a man of executive ability, *alone* upon the poop of a galleon. 'Twas plain the good father had no faith in the ship, though he commended the pilot.

Next day we climbed into our saddles and took the old north road that skirts the bay of San Francisco. Our tongues wagged freely, and the friar told many

stories. In return, I said that I was the bearer of a message from Magdalena to Vallejo, and bespoke a confessor's influence with the comandante. He eyed me sharply, and grinned when I said that Magdalena would sooner enter a convent than marry the Mexican.

"My son," said he, still grinning, "how didst thou obtain the confidence of this maiden?"

"How did I obtain the confidence of Alvarado, my father?"

"A countertime," he exclaimed, with his jolly laugh. "Well, my son, thou hast good credentials writ plain upon thy face. See to it that the devil does not erase God's character. And be not too friendly with that little witch. She in a convent! *Madre de Dios!*" And he laughed again, louder than ever.

"Will Vallejo interfere?" I asked.

"Perhaps," he replied evasively; "but, my son, be not too zealous on the maid's behalf. Plead her cause coolly. Perhaps thou wouldst do well to leave the matter to me."

"Gladly," said I, and I gave him Magdalena's ring.

"On one condition," he spoke emphatically, and dropped the familiar "thou." "You must pass me your word as a gentleman, señor, never to abuse the trust this innocent child has reposed in you."

"Father Quijas," said I, "you go too far."

"Tut, tut! Better too far than not far enough. I know what flesh and blood is, my son. Well, well, you understand what I mean. I'm her friend and yours, but I'd kill you with these hands if you wronged Magdalena Estrada."

"Amen," said I, and we rode on in silence.

We reached the mission of San Francisco Solano at mid-day upon the first of March, Ash Wednesday that year falling on the seventh. The comandante was walking up and down the plaza as we rode up, and he greeted Quijas with a shout of welcome, and me with Spanish courtesy. He looked a younger man than his nephew Alvarado, although just three years older—for he was born in 1806. His bodily presence and bearing were most distinguished. He wore no moustache upon a finely-cut upper lip, but the cheeks were fringed with side whiskers, black and curly as his hair. The forehead was broad and high, the chin rounded and dimpled, the eyes less keen than Alvarado's, but crowned with arching brows. He was, in fine, the typical hidalgo of high degree, a trifle pompous for so young a man, but a charming talker, full of anecdote, and well-informed upon many subjects. Like the de la Guerres of Santa Barbara and the Bandinis of San Diego, he counted amongst his peons many mechanics trained by the padres—carpenters, weavers, blacksmiths, and the like. No patriarch of ancient history possessed such flocks and herds. He owned at least forty thousand head of neat cattle, five thousand mares, two thousand colts, sheep innumerable, and other animals. Lieutenant Revere, of the United States Navy, who visited Vallejo in 1846, says "he had eight hundred trained vaquero horses on his ranches, of which thirty-five were picked *caballos de su silla*—his own private saddle horses—splendid animals, which a sultan would be proud to bestride."

I presented my letter on arrival; but the comandante said not a word concerning my mission till I

had dined and refreshed myself with a long siesta. Doña Francisca Vallejo showed me my room, and after the vermin-infested places I had slept in during my journey, you may be sure that I looked with delight upon a comfortable bed, whose linen was white as the snow of Shasta.

"The Saints give you pleasant dreams," said my hostess, glancing at the high-coloured engravings that adorned the wall—portraits of St. John, St. Joseph, and the Blessed Virgin. "*Hasta luego, señor.*"

My host was awaiting me as I stepped into the patio, and led me to his private room, where he offered me cigars and cigaritos. He looked at me attentively as I sat before him, and I returned his glance with interest. He wore the picturesque costume of the country—the short jacket, exquisitely embroidered, the *calzoneras*, open at the sides and displaying the finest and whitest linen, and a scarlet silk sash. The dress became him so vastly well that I ventured a compliment.

"You will do me a favour, señor," said he, "if you will accept at my hands a similar suit. We are something of a size, and the ladies will be gratified, ay, tickled to death, to see an Englishman in the trappings of a Spaniard. Nay, do not refuse. *Hola ! Inocente !*

He clapped his hands like a pacha, and a *mestizo*, or half-breed, came running.

"Take a complete suit, the dark blue one, and the *manga* that goes with it, to the room of the señor caballero. See to it that the *botas* and the linen are new."

Then he turned to me, and said courteously :

"Now, señor, I am at your service. My nephew, it seems, counts you his friend, and his friends are my friends, although," and he smiled pleasantly, "some of his enemies are my friends also. I wrote to him, as you know, that I was tired of these stupid quarrels, that I was no politician, but a *ranchero*, and he has sent you, it seems, to argue the matter."

"He sent me, Señor Comandante, because His Excellency knows that letters often miscarry."

"And messengers, too, are lost. The Indians are a perfect pest. Well, I thank you for coming, and him for sending so accomplished a caballero."

Then I told him briefly that Estudillo had sent an armed force to occupy Los Angeles; that José Castro would march south immediately, and that Alvarado would follow. I added that Juan Castañeda was now at San Buenaventura, and was expected to attack Santa Barbara. Vallejo smoked quietly, and made no comments.

"His Excellency," said I, in conclusion, "has no choice in the matter; he must *fight*."

"You Englishmen talk of fighting as if it were a *merienda*. You will accompany my nephew—no?"

"I hope to have that honour and pleasure."

"I shall stay here," said Vallejo gravely, "and do my duty. The Indians are keeping me busy, and I have hundreds of lives and valuable property to protect. This campaign, señor, will prove a farce, and I do not choose to play the part of a comedian. My nephew will please himself, as he always does. I shall take the same privilege."

I bowed; there seemed nothing more to be said.

Vallejo was a diplomatist; but he spoke truth when he linked duty with pleasure, and in my heart I hardly blamed him from holding aloof from these family squabbles. Perhaps he had an exaggerated sense of his own importance—perhaps he had other plans—for he asked me in a pointed manner if I had had talk with Larkin, and, on my replying in the negative, raised his brows.

“Don Tomas,” he observed carelessly, with his eyes upon the smoke from his cigar, “has a future before him. Make him your friend.”

“If the United States——”

“We will not discuss that, señor, if you please.”

I spoke of Soto, and Vallejo pronounced that accomplished cavalier a time-server. “But,” he concluded, “such men can be used. Any stick will do to stir mud with.”

I missed the point. Later, I knew that he alluded to the process of adobe-making, the bricks of which houses are built. And I knew also, in after years, that the houses built by Alvarado and this man crumbled into dust and corruption, because of the “sticks” who had stirred the mud—the sorry workmen so unworthy of their masters.

“And now,” said my host, rising, “let me show you Lacrymæ Montis, my beautiful spring of water. I shall build there some day.”

“The name,” said I, “is pretty, but not of good omen. This is the land of laughter.”

“We cannot banish the tears,” said Vallejo; “but we will laugh, señor, while we can.”

We passed a room where I caught a glimpse of Doña

Francisca superintending the labours of her needlewomen. Vast piles of linen lay upon the floor. Some of the girls were making lace, others hemmed sheets and napkins; all were gay as larks, and chatted like blue jays. From the kitchens came savoury odours and more laughter; from an arbour of Castilian roses the pathetic music of a guitar.

"There are tears in that," said I.

"Yes, señor, our music is sad, and our songs still sadder. *Ay*, but that boy plays well. If I could send him to Europe he would astonish his professors. I found him running barefoot at the mission of San Juan Bautista, and clapped my ear-mark on him."

"You have the best of everything, señor."

"That is my ambition."

We sauntered past the huts of the Indians, and quickened our steps at the sound of a tumult of voices.

"'Tis that cursed German Jew, Solomon," said Vallejo angrily. "I turned the impudent rogue from my door not an hour ago."

We skirted the wall of the rancheria, and came suddenly upon a picturesque group of Indians, mestizos, vaqueros, and half a score of women. The Indians wore a sort of camisole, but the others were gay in primary colours—reds, whites, blues, and yellows. The women carried rebozos, and each vaquero sported a serape, gaudy with tarnished gold and silver galloon. In the centre stood a stout fellow as big as I am; but a true and unmistakable son of Israel, one of the pioneers of his ubiquitous race in Alta California. When he saw the comandante he cringed, and laid a long forefinger against his large nose.

"Did I not tell you to begone?" said Vallejo harshly.

The Jew pointed to his wares, a collection of cheap finery, not more than a small mule could carry.

Solomon looked at me. The sight of a European seemed to encourage him, for he said in broken English to me:

"Der poor Jew don't make no friendts novheres."

Vallejo understood him, for he spoke English, although imperfectly. A silence fell on the rest of the company.

"Der poor Jew must live. It vasn't no use my going away till I do my peesness mit dese peoples."

He looked so fat and good-natured that I burst out laughing.

"He pretends that he does not understand my Spanish, señor, but he can chatter glibly enough with you. Tell him that I keep a cuerda for such dogs as he."

I was astonished at this harshness. Poor Solomon fixed his bright eyes upon mine, cringing and quivering at the word "cuerda." He had tasted raw-hide before.

"The cuerda!" he muttered. "Oh, my gracious!"

He began to pack his bundles, sighing and muttering to himself in Hebrew. A tear started down his long nose and fell with a splash upon a piece of silk. It was plain that our untimely presence had wrecked a fine market.

"I vish I vhas in Englandt," he said piteously to me. "I risk mine life mit der Indians to get here. Dem goods is halluf sold," and he choked with emotion.

"You are a Jew," said Vallejo coldly; "you must go."

"Yes, I am a Jew," retorted Solomon; "schoost the same as your Christ."

"You blaspheming dog——"

"Señor," said I, "this man is a Jew, but he has addressed me in my own tongue. And he has risked, as he says, his life to get here. Let him sell his goods this time, and I'll answer for it that he returns no more to Sonoma. You will not return, Solomon?"

"Mein Gott—*no!*"

"Of course," said Vallejo, bowing, "if you wish to befriend him, señor, that is another matter entirely."

Then he took my arm and led me aside, but not before I had seen the bright eyes of Solomon suffused with gratitude. Before we had walked a score of yards I could hear his voice loudly extolling the quality of his rebozos; and a roar of laughter broke from the crowd.

"Thank God," said my host to me, "we have but few Jews in California, but they stick to us like limpets. You thought me cruel, señor. Ay! you have an expressive face. But I know that man. They are barnacles—these hook-nosed, cringing pedlars. Why it is, I know not, but the sight of a Jew makes me shiver!"

Now, reading the past by the light of the present, it is no wonder to me that the Don shivered, for the Jew in California has been the curse of curses to him and his. As he said, the barnacles that prey upon the stout timbers of the finest ships, insidiously destroying them, may justly be compared with God's most peculiar people. The Shylocks of the lotus-land had more than their pound of Spanish flesh. They

drifted in with the human tide then steadily setting westward; they taught their customers to borrow; they took their gold in exchange for dross, and loaned it back at exorbitant rates of interest—at sixty, seventy, ay, and a hundred per cent. They were turned from the front doors, but they slipped in at the back. They smarted often beneath the cuerda of the wealthy ranchero. They suffered a thousand indignities and hardships.

But that was yesterday.

To-day you may see the descendants of the haughtiest families in Alta California peddling tamales along Van Ness Avenue—the Juden Strasse of San Francisco.

CHAPTER IX.

IN ARCADIA.

I WAS dressing for supper in the gay suit that my host had given me, when the mestizo, Inocente, brought me a small package and a note from the Jew, Solomon. The package contained a fine silk handkerchief such as the Californian men were wont to tie around their heads, and the note (a sheet torn from an account-book that doubtless held some queer entries) expressed very respectfully the writer's gratitude and the assurance that he would never forget the kindness of Mr. John Charity.

Before supper Vallejo introduced me to many whose names I have forgotten; amongst them, I remember, were his brother and brother-in-law. Quijas told me

that five-and-twenty persons sat daily at the comandante's board, eating and drinking of the best. In the dining-room were three tables, and I noted that whereas Doña Francisca could only see the guests at her own table, the comandante sat seeing and seen by all. Young Indian girls, Inditas, waited upon us. They glided to and fro, barefooted, clad in a livery of white calico spotted with red. Their thick tresses hung down their backs in two long braids tied with crimson ribbon, and their brown faces shone with good-humour and soap and water. I saw at once that these were no Digger Indians, and the Señorita Castro told me that they had been taken from a northern tribe of Solanos, and were prize specimens carefully culled out and as carefully trained. I marked too some very handsome old Spanish plate, and beautiful china. I record these things, because some writers have asserted that the rancheros of Alta California were gross feeders, eating often without knives and forks, mindful only of the quantity of the food, and caring nothing for the quality and the fashion of service. We drank champagne at Vallejo's table, and other foreign wines, and my host's small talk outsparkled the Clicquot.

Doña Francisca asked me presently if a date had been set for the Castañeda-Estrada wedding. I was on my guard, and answered her question cautiously.

"Ay!" she said sharply. "I hate that Mexican."

"Whom dost thou hate?" asked Vallejo.

"I hate Santiago Castañeda. Why do you allow Magdalena to marry a Mexican?"

"Her father has set his heart upon the match," said Vallejo. "Why should I interfere?"

A peculiar note of cruelty vibrated in his voice, and I wondered whether Quijas had delivered Magdalena's ring and message; surely not yet. Looking intently at Vallejo's handsome face, I marked a paradox: the relaxed features indicated strength and weakness, cruelty and tenderness, austerity and sensuality. One sees such faces amongst those in power, and they are interesting to behold so long as the issue of the strife between good and evil is left in doubt.

"Why should you interfere?" repeated his wife. "Because you alone are able to do so. Narciso Estrada will listen to you."

"I meddle not with others' affairs. Thou wouldst do well, my dear, to profit by my example."

"You dare not scold me this week," she retorted, and Vallejo smiled. During the week that precedes Ash Wednesday a certain licence prevails; children and servants are never punished; and everybody holds high carnival. Vallejo explained this to me, and promised to entertain me with a bull and bear fight, horse-racing, dancing, and card-playing. He seemed to take for granted that my visit would last at least a week, and pooh-poohed rather contemptuously his nephew's instructions to me to return as soon as possible.

Being very weary, I went to bed early, and slept soundly till dawn. I breakfasted alone with Vallejo, and then we rode out together to see something of the rancho. He looked at the saddle and accoutrements furnished me by Alvarado, and on our return forced upon my acceptance (for I was loth to be placed under such obligations) a saddle and bridle heavily

plated with silver, and a superb *coraza* (saddle-cloth) embroidered with gold thread. I interpreted the ironical smile on his face as follows: "My nephew has given you a saddle as plain as his speech. He cares nothing for show, and yet he knows, none better, the value of it."

I presented him in return with one of my pistols, a beautiful weapon that he had admired, and he listened with interest to the story of our flight from England, and the duels that preceded it. He said that duels were often fought in California, that the *gente de razon* used the sabre, and the lower classes the *puñal*, the knife they carry at the side of the right leg beneath the garter. I asked him if he were a swordsman, and he answered yes—that he preferred fencing to any other exercise, and often crossed foils with Padre Quijas. When we returned from our ride, he proposed a bout, and sent a boy to summon the jovial priest, who came gladly enough, you may be sure, for he never forgot that he had been a soldier. I cannot doubt that this morning's work was the means of preserving my life, for Vallejo and Quijas taught me several Mexican tricks: queer barbaric thrusts and feints easily parried after a little practice. Quijas found an opportunity to whisper to me that he had given the comandante Magdalena's ring and message, and that he (Vallejo) had promised to invite the girl to Sonoma, and would send the invitation by my hand. "He will do that and no more," said the padre, "and Tia Maria Luisa will be glad enough to come here. She has told me often that at no other house does she get such *gallinas rellenadas* (stuffed chickens) or a softer bed."

Upon hearing this good news I decided to start for Monterey on the morrow, and so advised my host, who protested that such haste was indecent. Yet I fancy he was soldier enough to appreciate my sense of duty, for he said that his nephew was well served, and that my welcome when I returned to Sonoma would be the warmer because my departure had been unduly sped. After the mid-day siesta I was entertained by Doña Francisca. I could see that her heart was of the softest, and sowed some good seed that bore fruit thereafter. Once she eyed me sharply, and flung at me a pretty note of interrogation.

"Señor," said she, "you seem to have studied many things for so young a caballero, and doubtless the art of love. How could you leave England?"

The best of women lay such traps for unsuspecting men.

"I have left one loving soul in England," said I; "my mother, señora."

"And how is it with you now?" she asked sweetly, with downcast eyes, that saw more than the embroidery in her lap.

"I have only been here two weeks, señora."

"How long does it take Englishmen to fall in love?"

"It is a question of climate—and temperament."

"You are cold, you English."

"Ice is easily melted, señora."

"Ay. You are not ice, Don Juan," and she laughed coquettishly, "for you do not melt at all. I thought you would have entertained me with a pretty story—a romance; but 'tis plain our señoritas have made no impression."

So we fenced; but I kept my secret, although I wondered if Quijas had been gossiping. I knew that amongst these people the tongue sometimes outstrips discretion. And the padre loved his bottle, and talked at score when tipping.

We supped at six, and afterwards danced in a large arbour upon ground beaten level for the purpose and hard as a floor. The women sat upon low benches at one end; at the other stood the men. One Indita danced superbly, and the men howled with delight. Presently a soldier darted forward and crowned the girl with his hat; a vaquero followed suit, and then another, till the pile of hats was a yard high. Then the dancer, still dancing, removed this extraordinary headpiece, and slowly circled round the arbour, while more hats and silver coins were hurled at her twinkling feet. She was too proud, I marked, to pick up the money, but the *tecolero* did so and brought it to her, pouring the silver into her lap as she sat, happily panting, amongst the other Inditas. Afterwards each man in turn redeemed his hat, paying what he pleased, but in no case less than two reales (one shilling). It seemed to me that I was tasting the true essence of Arcadia as I stood and watched these mirth-loving people. Some of them were terribly scarred with small-pox, for that pest had visited Sonoma in '34; but pleasure had marked them too, and I saw no unhappy faces, no frowns, nothing but smiles flashing out of red mouths, and eyes aflame with joy and excitement. Later, trays of *cascarones*, eggs filled with tinsel or perfumed water, were brought in. The cascaron levels all ranks. A stout nymph stole up behind me, tipped off my sombrero, and cracked her

egg with a sounding smack on the top of my scone. It is *de rigueur* to return the compliment, but the egg-breaker must not be detected in the act, which leads to much manœuvring. The comandante did not escape, and seemed to enjoy himself as well as the humblest of his retainers. Some of the daughters of the Suisun Indians wore nothing but a short smock of white calico that set off the glowing bronze of their limbs. They were not embarrassed by the scantiness of their skirts, nor troubled by conventionality, for suddenly, at a given signal, they surrounded me, linking their slender arms together, and then, amidst volleys of laughter from the crowd, began to dance round me, chanting some unintelligible jargon. I blushed, you may be sure, at finding myself a prisoner, but just as I was wondering what absurd prank they would play next, they stopped dancing, curtsied, broke up the circle, and fled.

"They paid you a great compliment," said Vallejo. "Your white skin provoked what was practically an act of worship. The padres wink at some of their superstitions. You are now a chief in the eyes of the Suisun maidens." But I saw that the warriors of the tribe had not approved this absurd performance.

I went to bed at midnight, heartily sorry that this pleasant visit was at an end, but thinking possibly overmuch of a sweet face in Monterey. I know that I dropped asleep as soon as my head touched the pillow, and that I seemed to wake suddenly, as if a hand had touched my lips, while in my ears was the echo of a voice. "Juanito!" it whispered, and the name was at once a caress and an invocation. I closed my eyes, and again, clearly and softly, as a petal drops upon the

water, my name fell on the silence. I sprang from the bed and looked out upon the moonlit plaza. Not a soul was abroad. The dance was over, and the dancers asleep. Dawn was at hand. And yet I could have sworn that a woman, speaking with the voice of Magdalena, had just murmured "Juanito!" I went back to bed, and reflected that fancy plays odd tricks—feeling and hearing had been appealed to, but not sight. I once more closed my eyes and dozed off, and as I hovered on the outskirts of slumber fancy touched another sense. Magdalena used a certain perfume, not a strong essence, but a subtle, faint, languorous odour, as of wood-violets. And now this delicate scent tickled my nose, but when I opened my eyes I could smell nothing save my own clothes, that reeked with the musk of the *cascarones*. I began to speculate upon what would happen next, and so speculating fell asleep. And now, on my honour, I cannot say whether I waked again or not, but I vow that I *thought* I waked, and believed myself to be in possession of my wits. For I felt the touch of a maiden's finger, I smelt that sweet perfume of violets, I heard my name, and I *saw* Magdalena herself standing at my bedside. She was dressed in a brodered petticoat, and around her slender shoulders was twisted a white rebozo worked with blue flowers. Her face was very pale and tear-stained, and in her dark eyes I could read fear and anguish, but not love. Nor did she look at me, but beyond me, as if beseeching Heaven, not man, for aid. As I gazed spellbound at this stricken face the figure vanished, and now indeed I was awake, trembling and wet with sweat, distraught with anxiety, for I doubted not that a vision had been

vouchsafed me. I rose and walked to the window. In the east I could discern a silvery gleam of light that waxed stronger as I gazed. Outside the birds were twittering their matins, and presently a cock crowed.

And three hundred miles lay between me and Magdalena !

The bell for vespers was tolling as I and my vaqueros approached Monterey upon the afternoon of Monday, the 5th of March. We had left the highway some three miles to the east of the town, and the tide being out we were riding leisurely along the shore of the bay. The sand-pipers, then as now, ran nimbly across the wet sands ; the gulls were screaming above the white spume of the combers ; and, far out, where the shoals of sardines lay packed together, I could see the huge cormorants plunging headlong for their supper. Beyond the Punto de los Pinos the sun was sinking into a saffron-coloured sea, and the sky above was a tone lighter than the water—of a pale cadmium in hue, stained with blood-red reeks of mist. To the north-west lay the fog-banks, seemingly still, a grey, grim host, awaiting the signal of their pilot, the keen trade wind. Soon they would steal up and blot out all life, and colour, and warmth. Already their herald, the evening breeze, blew chill upon my cheek.

As I marked the peace that seemed to hang like a celestial tissue above the old capitol, I saw a horseman rapidly approaching us. He drew rein—'twas Castañeda—and doffed his hat.

“ I am rejoiced to see you,” he said politely.

I wondered, as he turned his horse and cantered at my side, at the peculiar expression upon his face.

"I kiss your hands," I replied, not willing to be outdone.

"You return in the nick of time."

"The carnival?" said I.

"My wedding, señor, takes place to-morrow."

His cold eye was on me, but I shook in my saddle.

"Your wedding?" I stammered.

"Yes, señor; to-morrow, by the grace of God, I lead to the altar the señorita Estrada."

CHAPTER X.

FACIT INDIGNATIO VERSUM.

I WAS speechless with anger and dismay, but—the Lord be praised—my wits did not desert me. Indeed, after a short pause, I begged him to accept my congratulations. "For," said I, with a sneer—he marked, possibly, a tremor in my voice—"for surely, señor, even you must confess that the best and most accomplished of men will receive more at the hands of the señorita Estrada than he will give."

His eyes sparkled with rage, as he nodded curtly in reply.

"A week ago," I continued, "there was no mention of this marriage."

"Pardon me, señor, you are mistaken. Our plans were not then made public. I deprecate undue haste as much as any man, but the times are such that ceremony must courtesy to convenience. Castro has marched south. I shall take no part in this quarrel,

because my cousin Juan is on the other side, and I am not a Californian. The señorita Estrada needs a protector."

"She does," said I.

Here we parted, and I rode straight to the plaza, and dismounting, walked to Alvarado's house. There I learned that His Excellency was seriously ill and a-bed. However, he consented to see me, and a minute later I entered a very comfortless room and saluted my chief. I asked but coldly after his health, for I was raging inwardly, being convinced that I had been sent upon a fool's errand. He told me that he had succumbed to a sharp attack of inflammatory rheumatism upon the afternoon of the day I had left Monterey. Then he read the letters I delivered.

"Tell me, frankly, what you think," he said.

"I am thinking, señor, that a marriage between Castañeda and the señorita Estrada is an affair that stains the honour of her kinsmen. The bride loathes the groom."

If I expected an outburst of anger I was disappointed.

"What has that to do with you, my friend?"

"Nothing," I stammered, like a green boy, "nothing, your Excellency."

Then, scarlet in the face, I told him in substance what had passed between Vallejo and me, and, upon his again demanding my opinion, pronounced the comandante a diplomatist, biding the issue of a quarrel he refused to make his own.

"But there is more behind this—no?" muttered Alvarado uneasily. "They say in your language that

lookers-on see most of the game. My uncle till now has been my active ally. He has had his finger in every pie. Why does he call himself a *ranchero*?"

His keen eyes were on mine; they were steady as beacon fires, although his lips were twitching with pain.

"Come and see me to-morrow; and look you, my friend, do not meddle in affairs that concern others alone. I have work for you to do. *Dios!* I rejoice that you are in no woman's mesh. Think of your handsome friend—tied hand and foot to a wife's petticoat."

His voice had a cold ironical note in it. The gossips vowed that His Excellency left his *fiancée*, the lovely Martino Castro, to sigh by herself upon her father's rancho. Certainly he regarded love as something apart from and immeasurably below the duties and responsibilities of his position; and in this, as I now know, and in this alone, he was wanting in a sense of the true proportion of things.

"I thank your Excellency for your advice," said I, pausing on the threshold.

He laughed lightly.

"*Bueno!* You English have it that advice is given and not taken. That is not really so; advice is generally taken. We are all influenced by the opinions of others: and that, señor, is the reason why I so seldom give—advice. *Adios*, and thank you for your services."

I walked away convinced that my patron was a masterful man, and yet—strange to say—I liked him the better, because he was stronger than I. None

the less, John Charity determined to meddle most strenuously in an affair that he held to concern him more intimately than aught else on earth.

As I crossed to Larkin's house I saw that the town was *en fête*. Flags and banners hung from the windows; booths lined the plaza and adjoining streets; on all sides I heard the twanging of guitars and the squeaking of fiddles; dancing, gambling, and drinking claimed the attention of the gay Montereyans.

As soon as supper was over I walked up the hill to the Casa Estrada with the intention of delivering Vallejo's letters, and if possible exchanging a word in private with Magdalena. Why had she, so full of fire and spirit, submitted tamely to these outrageous proceedings? Had she a plan? And if so—what was it?

At the adobe I found a gay company assembled to inspect the trousseau of the bride and the donas of the groom. Although the time had been short, the good Tia Maria Luisa had proved equal to the occasion. The exquisite linens and embroideries had lain for months in the handsome baules—chests lined with camphor-wood and covered with red leather, brass-mounted, studded with brass nails, and gay with painted flowers—and Castañeda during his last visit to Mexico had bought the donas, a pearl necklace, some filmy, fairy-like under-garments, lace, fans, a mantilla, and a pair of diamond rings for his wife's pink ears. These were spread out before the envious eyes of señoras and señoritas.

"*Santisima!*" said one pretty girl; "but our Magdalena must be a happy woman to-night."

"She laughs, and laughs, and laughs," said another. "Ay! she is happy, of course."

Pushing my way through the crowd, I presented my letters to Estrada and Tia Maria Luisa. Magdalena was standing by Don Narciso, and as her glance met mine she quivered and let fall her heavy lids. When she raised them languidly, for my life I could not interpret the message of her eyes. She stepped forward and greeted me with a smile, but the hand she placed in mine was cold as a stone. Castañeda, who was near, had doubtless told her of my return, and he watched us narrowly as we exchanged a half-dozen conventional phrases. I dared not lower my voice, and I pressed her hand to my lips and felt the muscles of her slim fingers harden beneath the soft, velvety skin.

Then in a cold, courteous voice, Don Narciso thanked me for bringing his kinsman's letters, and begged me to be present at the morrow's ceremony in the church at Carmelo. I bowed, and turned to Tia Maria Luisa.

"Your friends have gone," said she dolefully. "*Ay de mi!* but I am sorry. The Señor Valencia has left me nothing but a pot of dulces as sweet as himself! *Que desgracia!* But his wife! *Madre de Dios!* it is well that the lovely lady has taken her white skin to Santa Barbara. The men had begun to quarrel for her smiles; and, look you," her voice sank to a whisper mellow as mayonnaise, "look you, señor, even our bridegroom was not proof against her charms. Oh, you men, you men!"

"Señora," said I, "I was a saint till I came to Monterey, and now I am a sinner. Whose fault is that?"

"*Tate tate!* You a saint! *Hé Hé!* A likely story.

No man was ever a saint till he was dead—*se Dios me perdona!*”

God knows I jested with a sore heart, waiting and watching for a chance to speak to Magdalena. I was sure that she would sleep with Tia Maria upon the eve of her wedding. Custom demanded it; and the house would be crammed with friends and relations. I dared not approach her window at night. I knew of no soubrette who might be intrusted with a letter. In short, I was where many another man has been before me—in a blind alley of perplexity, unwilling to retreat, unable to advance.

I took pleasure, however, in watching the face of Castañeda. The man was ill at ease, at a loss to account for Magdalena's gaiety. Her smiles bred frowns, and more than once she rallied him upon his dismal countenance. Others remarked his sour looks, and whispered together in corners, murmuring behind their fans. 'Twas plain the Mexican found little favour in the eyes of the Montereyenas.

Soto presently engaged me in talk, and I said, in answer to a question, that I was enjoying myself vastly well, and looking forward to the morrow's function.

“I suppose, señor, that none will see the bride till she leaves this house upon her father's arm—no outsiders, I mean? That is our custom.”

“And ours also.”

He chattered away, describing the details of a Californian wedding, but eyeing me, I fancied, maliciously, as if he knew that I was in torment. Then the devil prompted him to allude to my bout with sabres at the cuartel.

"You handle the fleuret better than the sword," said he.

As he spoke I saw my way clear. Why, in the name of the Sphinx, had I overlooked such a simple solution of the problem? Being essentially a man of peace, I had not considered the propriety of killing the Mexican, although I had come to the conclusion that the world could spare him. He was no coward; he believed himself to be my superior in the use of the sabre; in a word, he would not shrink from the ordeal of combat. It was simple as the game of beggar-my-neighbour. Before midnight some pretext could be found for a quarrel; we would meet at dawn; and a funeral would give the Montereyenas almost as much entertainment as a wedding. I laughed as I reflected that Soto, Castañeda's toady and parasite, had given me my cue.

"You are in high spirits," he sneered.

"I was thinking about that queer flicking cut of your friend's. Faith! it was too much for me. Would he teach me the trick, señor?"

"Perhaps," said Soto, with his evil smile.

"Three times he had me. It piqued me, señor; I confess it; but, as you say, I can handle the foil better than the sabre."

Till now I had held aloof from Magdalena, not wishing to arouse suspicion by my attentions, for the cold eye of Don Narciso was ever on me, and the dueña doubtless had her instructions. Despite appearances, I had absolute trust in Magdalena. From the moment I had felt her cold hand tighten convulsively in mine I knew that she was true to me, that her love was stronger than

ever. But I was by no means so certain that custom might not drive a Spanish woman—little more than a child—to the arms of another. Policy now constrained me to play a bolder game. So I joined the group at the other end of the sala, and flung a phrase at Castañeda.

“Señor,” said I, with my best bow, “you are thinking, doubtless, that marriage is a more serious thing for a man than for a woman.”

How he scowled as I grinned in his handsome face!

“And you, señorita,” I continued glibly, turning to Magdalena; “would it be an impertinence to ask what thoughts are chasing themselves so merrily through your beautiful head? I am one of those who believe that experience should be borrowed, not bought. You——”

“I am making the most of the passing hour, señor,” she replied gaily. “Lent is coming, no? But my thoughts! Ay! you must guess those for yourself.”

The others laughed, but looked queerly at the sour-faced groom.

“Don Santiago,” said I impudently, “is naturally distraught with anxiety. The cup is at his lips; he is thirsty; but he must wait till to-morrow.”

Magdalena drew together her delicate brows. I perceived that she thought me indiscreet. Yet her lovely eyes were sparkling with malice.

“Ay, ay!” exclaimed a pretty girl. “To-morrow never comes, señor. You know what ‘mañana’ means with us. *Huy!* Don Santiago need not fear. It is too late now for him to count the cost.”

“There was a story once——” I began.

“A story, a story,” they clapped their hands. “*Que alegría!* The señor Inglese will tell us a story.”

"You may know it already," said I, smiling. "I would not tell it, only the circumstances are so entirely different in this case. 'Tis a story writ in verse—the love-story of young Lochinvar and the lovely Ellen."

"The story of Elena! For the love of the saints, señor, tell us the story of Elena."

"Elena," said I slowly, with my eyes on the Mexican, "was the rich and beautiful daughter of a Scotch ranchero. Lochinvar was young, handsome, and poor, I suspect, although we are not told so. Elena's father had betrothed her to a man she hated, for there were bitter factions in those days between the North and the South, and this man would take no part in them. He was a laggard in love and a dastard in war."

Those present knew that Castañeda had declined to draw his sword against the abajeños. He grew livid with rage as I continued, but said not a word. Some of the men smiled; the women paled; and Magdalena flushed scarlet.

"Elena," I said softly, "loved Lochinvar; but the day of her wedding was set, and he was not within call. When he heard of the marriage he was far away. He had to swim rivers to get to her side. That reminds me the straits of Carquinas are cold waters. Well, Lochinvar arrived in time for the wedding—just in time, no more. They danced at those Scotch weddings as you dance here in Alta California. And they were all famous riders, like you, señores. And, of course, such a caballero as Lochinvar had a splendid horse, the finest in the country."

They listened in breathless silence.

"Lochinvar entered the house of the bride's father,

and left his horse outside, as you do, señores. Then he asked the lovely Elena for one dance, which could not well be refused. He was gay and debonair, this Scottish caballero, but the other, the laggard and dastard, stood apart frowning, and the old father, you may be sure, was fuming also. As they danced, Lochinvar whispered one word in the pink ear of Elena. Only one, señoritas."

"*Santisima!*" murmured the pretty girl at my side; "as if one word was not enough."

"Yes, one word, and as they neared the door she saw that his horse stood there, champing his bit, full of fire and strength. In a moment—p-s-s-s-st!—they were outside the hall, in another Lochinvar had swung the lady to the saddle and mounted also. Before the astonished guests could stir from their seats they were off and away."

"*Madre de Dios!*" ejaculated the little señorita, who did not understand the significance of my story. "He was a true caballero, that one! *Ojala!* Had he Spanish blood in his veins, no?"

"Were they pursued and caught?" said Magdalena calmly.

"They were pursued, but not caught?" said I.

"Ay, ay!" cried the little one; "they would have been caught here—sure. The bridegroom would have taken a caponera."

"And what, señor," said Magdalena to me, "would the poor caballero have done in that case?"

"Probably," said I, "he would have killed his rival at the very steps of the altar, if need be. Rest assured that the wrong man would never have married the lovely Elena. And now, señorita, I will bid you good-night."

I bowed to the company assembled, and took my leave. If I had not misread the expression upon Castañeda's face, I would surely have company before I reached my lodging.

CHAPTER XI.

HABET.

I LAUGHED quietly to myself as I stepped out into the raw, damp fog, leaving my Californian friends agape with astonishment and dismay. I could see Castañeda's scowl, and Soto's black moustachios twitching in protest of my impudence. But what pleased me most was the spirit displayed by my dear Magdalena. As I had bowed before her, she flashed into my face a glance of love and passion that set my pulses a-quiver. Castañeda had marked that sweet message of trust and approval, and you may be sure his anger needed no such whet, for already, if desire were as potent as performance, I had been stiff and stark. The word dastard had pricked him in his tenderest spot.

I had hardly reached my lodging when Soto, as I had expected, came hot-foot after me. We sought together my small bedroom, and I bade him be seated. Perhaps the expression upon my face puzzled him, for he stared askance at my courtesy, and fiddled nervously with his hat. He did not sit down.

"You've insulted us, señor," he gasped.

"If you choose to make it your quarrel," I replied, "you will find me willing to give you satisfaction later.

I presume you speak now for the Señor de Castañeda? Yes; I have insulted him publicly. I admit it."

"And for what r-r-reason?" stammered Soto, looking less fierce.

"Your ingenuity," said I, "need not be at fault for a reason. Let us say that I had a mind to learn the secret of that cut."

"*Carajo!* you jest, señor."

"Why not? I smile, and the other man scowls. It is a matter of temperament."

"He will kill you."

"Perhaps. 'Twould be a pity—eh? Because it would interfere with our little affair. When you came in just now I saw that you were burning to cross swords with me."

"You are mistaken," he muttered uneasily. "I—I hoped that the insult was unintentional."

"Does Don Santiago want an apology?"

"No; but if the affair could be arranged——"

"It can be arranged in five minutes, my dear sir. I will send for my friend Pearson. Meanwhile, **pray** sit down and let me prescribe a glass of cognac. I see that you are distressed."

He took a chair, and I despatched one of Larkin's Indians for the doctor. I happened to know that he was in the house.

"You have insulted the Señor Estrada, too," said Soto, who did not refuse to swallow my medicine. "I confess that I do not understand you, señor."

I shrugged my shoulders and laughed.

When Pearson came in I told him gravely that his services were claimed as man and probably as surgeon.

He made no objections, so I left him alone with Soto, merely warning him that a fight was inevitable. Presently he joined me, as I was pacing up and down the road, and said that Soto exacted choice of weapons as being the aggrieved party. I told him that I was prepared to make all reasonable concessions, and then he said nervously that Castañeda was considered invincible with the sabre.

"The sabre by all means," said I.

Accordingly, it was arranged that we should meet at dawn on the morrow behind the old fort that overlooks the town. Soto departed, swaggering, and eyeing me as if I were already his man's meat. Then Pearson and I talked the matter over, and as I knew him to be an honest fellow, I confessed frankly that Magdalena was at the bottom of the mischief; that I loved her; and that I had reason to believe she loved me.

"I fancy," said I, "that she had a plan, Pearson; she swore to me that sooner than marry this Mexican she would enter a convent. But she feared to compromise Alvarado. It's strange what an influence that man has upon all who come near him. I feel already that I am his servant."

Pearson admitted as much for himself, and added that His Excellency was like to lose my services. I cooled his apprehensions somewhat with a toot from my horn, but he looked worried and anxious, and entreated me to go to bed. As I was dog-tired, I made no objections, and soon was lying snug beneath the sheets. Nor did I lie awake, borrowing trouble, but fell asleep at once and never stirred till Pearson doused me with cold water.

“Egad!” said he, grinning, “a hundred mile ride is better than a dose of opium. I’ll warrant the Don was more easily wakened. Well, I have coffee for you and a red-hot tamale. An Englishman fights best on a full stomach.”

I ate what he provided with appetite, and then the good fellow pulled out a box of ointment and anointed my wrist and forearm.

“I’m no swordsman,” he said, “but this will make your sinews as supple as silk.”

It was thoughtful of him, for the morning was chill, and the fog lay heavy upon the landscape. He told me that one of the officers would accompany us, because he thought it well in case of complications to provide a native-born witness. Castañeda would bring two friends to the ground. When we set forth I was as hot as the tamale I had just swallowed, with the blood tingling to my finger-tips, and, not being the first to arrive, I had no time to grow cold.

The spot was admirably chosen: level as a billiard-table, the ground neither too hard nor too soft, no trees; and, the fog obscuring the sun, the light was fairly apportioned to each. Castañeda, I marked, was in excellent form, and he saluted me with an amiable grin, as if to say that he bore no malice against a doomed man. When we faced each other I saw that he was quite confident, and as eager as I for the signal to begin.

However, the opening was tame enough, for Castañeda was biding an opportunity for his favourite cut, and I was willing to humour him. Presently it came, so quickly that I barely parried it. I saw him frown, and

laughed. Then he attacked me more fiercely, advancing and retreating, Spanish fashion, cutting and thrusting with great vigour and no little grace. I contented myself with acting entirely on the defensive, knowing that my physical condition must be better than his, and soon I had the pleasure of hearing his breath sob in his throat. Then I pressed him as hard as he had pressed me, but he broke ground again and again with amazing dexterity and quickness. Indeed, he used his feet like an accomplished master-of-arms, and had his sword-play matched his dancing this story would assuredly have never been written. Finally, I fainted, lunged again, and split his cheek from mouth to ear. 'Twas a horrible cut, one that must scar him for life, but not a dangerous wound, nor one that would keep him from fulfilling his noon engagements. I thought, of course, that the duel was over, and cursed myself for a bungler. Castañeda cursed too, and refused to stop. Three stitches were taken in his cheek, and then once more our swords crossed. He had his wind again, and I could read in his eye the most venomous determination to kill me. Knowing that he was tricky, I was on my guard, but twice he nearly had me, and he cursed each time with rage and disappointment. I now made certain that he was at my mercy, and I think he knew it too, for his eyes were grim with despair.

Now, so far, I had kept cool, but just then as I was planning the last *coup* the sound of voices floated up out of the fog below us. If we were interrupted by officials Castañeda would go to San Carlos a sorry bridegroom, it is true, but quite able to play the part. The fight must be ended now or never. As each was

conscious of the approach of strangers, we paused, and the same thought must have quickened both our minds, for we lunged together so fiercely and quickly that our swords entered our bodies as if we had mutually agreed beforehand that neither should leave the ground alive.

Fortunately for both of us we stooped as we lunged; my point entered Castañeda's right shoulder, and ranged upward and outward; his—for he had aimed lower—pierced my pectoral and latissimus dorsi muscles. We fell in a crumpled heap as our seconds rushed forward. Then I felt that the blood was pouring from me, and the voices round me slowly grew inarticulate. I must have fainted soon after, for I remember nothing till I woke to the consciousness of being in my own bed at Larkin's, with a queer feeling of numbness in my right side, and of nausea in my stomach.

"You're all right," said Pearson cheerily.

"And Castañeda?"

"He's better off than you are—a mere flesh wound; but you've set your brand on him for life."

"Where is he?" I asked faintly.

"In bed, I suppose. Now, look here, Jack, you keep quiet, and inside of a week you'll be up and about. You've lost a lot of blood, my good fellow, but he missed your lung."

I closed my eyes and presently felt much stronger, and the feeling of nausea passed away. Pearson had bound up my wound, applying some styptic that stopped the flow of blood. He began to joke about the affair, and said that I needed cupping anyway, for he was satisfied that my blood ran too hotly in my veins.

I asked him the time of day, and he showed me his big silver watch. It was not yet nine.

"I shall leave you now," he said a few minutes later. "By the way, the whole town has it that Mrs. Valence was the cause of the duel. Castañeda paid her marked attentions, you know; so marked that I wonder Valence did not call him to account. I believe old Estrada was beginning to think he had lost a rich son-in-law. Well, by by! Keep quiet."

After he had gone I reflected that 'twas just as well that the town should believe what it did. One or two knew better, but they would hold their peace. Castañeda had ever a taste for forbidden fruit, and doubtless he had little love for Magdalena. His damnable passion for Lettice accounted for his frowns, and for the smiles of the Montereyenas. So far as Magdalena was concerned, the word "laggard" had been as applicable as "dastard." I sighed contentedly, though my wound was throbbing and smarting, when I thought of his slit cheek; his looks, at least, would never again commend him to ladies' favour.

Thomas Larkin came in and sat beside my bed, well pleased, I could see, with the issue of the fight; and his wife, an American woman, brought me a delicious cup of tea, and some sugared phrases.

"You are the most popular man in Monterey," she said.

I drank the tea, and began to feel myself again; but when I stirred in bed the pain was horrible.

Larkin was much too busy to linger long; his store was filled with carnival customers, and I begged him to give them his attention. But Mrs. Larkin was in the

mood for a gossip. She gave me, with little encouragement on my part, the history of the past week, absolving Lettice of blame, but laying stress upon Castañeda's extravagant and shameless behaviour.

"Of course," said she, "Mr. Valence's lady, sweet soul, does not understand our ways. A Spanish woman might have been more careful. She has a fine spirit, Mr. Charity, and a pretty wit. She did not encourage the fellow, but she suffered his attentions, because"—then she laughed—"well, because the dear heart was, maybe, a little mite jealous of the compliments paid by her husband to other ladies. Mercy me! but Mr. Valence is a handsome man. I'll warrant he's made more than one heart ache!"

If she were really curious as to the true cause of the duel, Mrs. Larkin had wit enough to ask no indiscreet questions; but, to my amazement, she seemed to think Magdalena's conduct in no way to be criticised. Spanish girls, she said, did what they were bid.

"She could not disobey her father, Mr. Charity, and the donas are very beautiful. Did you see the diamond earrings?"

I listened, secretly amused, thinking of what a recent writer would call the barrier of associations that cannot be imparted. In this lotus land of love 'twas plain that custom ruled supreme in the marriage mart.

"But I cannot believe," said I, "that she would really have married him. She may love another."

"I'd not be a bit surprised *at that*," said Mrs. Larkin emphatically. "Bless you, sir, 'tis love, and love, and love with these pretty señoritas. They talk of it so much that they think as lightly as they speak of it.

An American girl or an English girl would be ashamed to talk as these little misses do."

"But they think about it just as much," said I.

"Maybe they do, sir; but an American woman wouldn't marry one man loving another, and most of these Californians hold it no shame to do so."

I confess that these idle words smarted worse than my wound. Was it possible that Magdalena would have married the Mexican, loving me? I burned with indignation at the mere thought of it.

When my hostess left me I lay still, turning over in my mind what she had said and left unsaid. Mrs. Larkin was certainly an unimpeachable witness, but her Anglo-Saxon blood had possibly discoloured her testimony. And I reminded myself that no rule is without an exception. Most of the girls I had met were obviously cut to pattern—pulpy of mind and destined in a few years to be pulpy also of body, superstitious, believing firmly that an angry father could invoke the curse of God, sensuous rather than sensual, frivolous, vain, greedy, and withal charming, with the charm of feminine weakness that appeals so subtly to a strong man. I had actually seen Magdalena gloating over the filmy laces that formed part of the donas. And why not? Even Mrs. Larkin set an absurd price upon a pair of earrings.

At ten Pearson examined my wound, and said that the hæmorrhage had stopped entirely. He seemed very cross and sulky, but I supposed that some detail connected with his daily duty had upset him. I asked how my antagonist fared, and he cursed him roundly, and said that the rascal was bragging of his victory.

I believed him to be laid by the heels, and put no more questions.

"Now mind," said Pearson, as he stood on the threshold, "no matter what happens, don't you leave your bed. You can see your friends, and I've found a nurse for you, a not ill-looking Indian girl, who will keep the flies off you and get you what you want. *Hasta luego.*"

The girl was waiting outside, and came in as Pearson bade me keep my bed. I thought that the doctor made some sign to her, for she nodded her head intelligently. Then the door closed.

I dozed off in a minute, too, and awoke with the clang and clamour of bells in my ears.

"What is that?" said I.

"The church bells. 'Tis Shrove Tuesday, señor."

I did not know that Catholics held a midday service upon Shrove Tuesday, but the girl's explanation was simple enough. The church was hard by, and the bells made a deal of noise. I tried in vain to sleep.

Just then the girl rose to answer a tap at the door. Some one, it seemed, wished to see me.

"'Tis the Jew, Solomon," said the Indita disdainfully. "He says he has a miraculous salve."

I wondered vaguely how the deuce he had contrived to get from Sonoma to Monterey. Had he seven-leagued boots or a magic carpet? I told the girl I would see him, and presently he shuffled in very humbly, with his eyes sparkling and his long nose twitching with sympathy.

"Good Lord!" said I, "what wind blew you so far south?"

"Der trade," he replied, with quick wit. "I found

a drogher" (a ship that carries hides). "Vell, yes, peesness vas goodt—*fine*. Dot Vallejo is grazzy—hein? I shvallow his insults, yes, but I sell mine goods. So you haf bin fighting? *Himmel!* I am sorry. Undt I bring you mine salve."

He laid the box of ointment on the bed. He was sacrificing time and money to gratitude, and I told him that I was sensible of this. He shrugged his fat shoulders.

"Vell, you vas kind to der poor Jew. He vill not forget you vas his friendt."

"Come and see me again. Minutes are worth pesetas just now."

"Vell, you see choost now der beoples vas gone mit der church."

"What, all of them?"

"Dey vas crazy mit funerals undt weddings."

"And who is to be married?" I asked.

The Indita jumped up, and began to wave her hands.

"God of my soul! Get out of this, thou swine!"

"Hold your pert tongue," I said sharply. "Solomon is my friend."

Then the queer creature covered her face with her skirt and began to sob. Later, I was told by Pearson that he had threatened to kill her if I learned what was passing in the town.

"Whose marriage is it?" I asked again.

"*Ay de mi*," sobbed the girl. "*Ay de mi! Virgen Santisima!*"

"Vy, it's dot daughter of Estrada," said Solomon, sorely puzzled, but obedient. "Undt she's marrying dot Mexican——"

“Great God!” I exclaimed, sitting up. “Castañeda marrying?”

The Indita howled, and Solomon laid a heavy hand upon my sound shoulder, forcing me back upon the pillow. I struggled vainly in his grasp.

“Solomon, Solomon,” I gasped. “Listen. Do you want to do me a service? Then for Heaven’s sake get me to the church! Choke that screaming fool, or chuck her out of the window! No, no. She’s strong and can help us. Leaning on both of you I can stagger to the church. The wedding was to have taken place at Carmelo, but I suppose they changed their plans. Quick, now! Raise me. That’s it. Gently does it. Good! My trousers—and that cloak.”

He obeyed deftly, and the girl, frightened into silence, assisted him. I suffered tortures, but found to my great joy that I could walk, and I did walk, step by step, out of my room into the deserted street, and finally into the church. ’Twas folly, madness, if you will, but a raging devil of jealousy sustained me. And he, you may be sure, was stronger than Solomon and the girl together.

As I stumbled along, the facts unrolled themselves. The Mexican had plenty of pluck and an iron will. I respected him for keeping his appointment. Magdalena, poor little maid, had been unable to repudiate the customs and traditions of her country.

I found the church packed with people, but the main aisle was clear, and I could see Magdalena and Castañeda standing side by side upon the steps of the altar.

And then a paroxysm of despair unnerved me. I was weak from loss of blood, and leaning unnoticed against

the white-washed wall I blubbered like a schoolboy. Strength deserted me; faith and hope were crushed; even the fierce flames of jealousy were burned out. But wretched though I was, I marked the details of the scene. To-day, after so many years have passed, the imprint of that picture is still fresh upon the quicksands of memory. I saw the mystic candles blazing upon an altar decked with flowers and resplendent with brocade, before which stood priest and acolytes sexless in flowing robes; the boys in cassock and cotta swinging their censers, the padre in gorgeous vestments. Then my eyes fell on Castaneda, tall and grim, black and sombre in clothes of European cut, and on the faithless Magdalena in green satin, her hair—gleaming dark beneath the silvery tissue of a mantilla—piled high upon her small head; below, to the left, was Estrada in full Californian costume—*calzoneras*, *jaqueta*, *serape*, and *botas*—a brave caballero in the crowd's eyes, in mine a scoundrel. The rest of the company was a vibrant blur of brilliant colours—reds, yellows, blues, and greens. Upon all lay the prismatic tints of the stained glass windows, lending to substance the unreality of shadow.

And then out of the silence floated the passionless voice of the priest:

“Santiago Inocente, wilt thou take Magdalena, here present, for thy lawful wife, according to the rite of our Holy Mother, the Church?”

In tones as cool and measured came the answer:

“I will.”

“Magdalena, wilt thou take Santiago Inocente, here present, for thy lawful husband, according to the rite of our Holy Mother, the Church?”

A pause followed :

“ I will *not* ! ”

In a moment a buzz of amazed protest burst from the crowd, and I saw Magdalena turn and confront the congregation.

“ I will not,” she repeated scornfully, and her words pattered like hail upon my ears. “ I told my father that I would not marry a man who was odious to me, a Mexican. But,” her sweet voice quivered, “ he dragged me here against my will, and now, in the presence of God and before you, I solemnly vow and declare that I will *not* marry Santiago de Castañeda. I do not love him, and he does not love me.”

While she spoke my heart was beating furiously; as she finished I struggled forward, staggered a couple of paces, and fell. I heard the buzz of many voices swelling to a chorus of applause. I smelled the pungent fumes of the incense; I saw the church and its contents reel as if smitten by an earthquake; and then my very life seemed to ebb from my body—and I knew no more.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BLOODY FIELD OF SAN BUENAVENTURA.

FOR the next ten days I kept my bed, a mighty sick man, for excitement and loss of blood played the deuce with my heart's action, and had I not known that life for me was so well worth the living I might have died of sheer weakness and anæmia. I was a sorry figure, you may be sure, when I first took the air upon Pearson's arm, lean of face—where before I had been full—pale

as putty, and feeble and awkward as a new-born colt. Like the colt, however, I soon sucked health and strength from the glorious spring breezes, not to mention more solid nourishment generously provided by my kind friend Mrs. Larkin. 'Twas from her I learned in detail what passed in the church during and after my fainting spell. Magdalena, it seemed, had aroused a pretty tempest of sympathy and pity in the hearts of many gentlemen present. Upon the arm of a cousin she had left the church, and Mrs. Larkin said that the little girls strewed flowers in her path, as if she had been in truth a bride, and that she walked down the aisle with a smile upon her face and a sparkle in her eyes that became her vastly well. The groom and Don Narciso were left scowling at the altar, mingling their curses with the lamentations of Tia Maria Luisa. In the confusion Magdalena passed me by, knowing nothing then of my presence, unable to see a prostrate man on account of the crowd around her, and believing me, of course, to be safe in my bed at Larkin's. The brave girl marched straight to Alvarado's house and told him what she had done.

Meanwhile, Solomon and the Indita, with Pearson's help, had carried me to my lodging. Within an hour the town knew that I had dragged myself to the church, and the comments upon such a piece of folly were, you may be sure, of a mixed complexion. Finally, the story reached the ears of Magdalena, with the corollary that I was like to pay dearly for my rashness. She tried, in defiance of Spanish etiquette, to see me, but Pearson guarded my door and allowed none admittance. And Alvarado, it seems, entreated his cousin to be discreet. I learned later that he persuaded her, not without diffi-

culty, to accept Vallejo's invitation. Don Narciso was about to take the road for San Luis Obispo; he had no stomach for his daughter's company; he dared not leave her in Monterey, so he added his commands to the Governor's entreaties. In brief, she was constrained to go aboard a small vessel that set sail for Sonoma upon the afternoon following, but she wrote and despatched by a secret hand the first love-letter I had ever received. 'Twas in Spanish, and the literal translation may sound to northern ears high-falutin, but to me, I know, her sweet superlatives were as wine to the weak:

“BEST BELOVED OF MY SOUL” (she wrote), “I leave thee, because 'tis best—so my cousin says—that I should anger my father no more. He has called me dreadful names that I would blush to set down upon paper. And he looks at me—ay! so cruelly! His glances smart like the lash of the cuerda. Tia Maria Luisa says that I shall burn in hell for ever for loving a heretic, and, may God pardon me, but I do love thee, Juanito, my darling, and I kiss thy yellow curl when I tell my beads! *Santisima!* but thou didst send me a pretty bridegroom; yet I thank thee in the name of all women for setting thy mark upon his false face. And now, my best-beloved, *adios*. The rude Pearson says thou wilt be in the saddle again in three weeks, and my cousin needs thee. I must go north and thou wilt go south, but my thoughts by night and day are with thee, my Juan. And my heart tells me that we shall meet again soon. And, Juanito, the Barbareñas are beautiful! *Dios de mi alma!* I shall burn with jealousy when I think of thy blue eyes resting softly upon the

faces of other girls. And, O my darling, beware of de Castañeda! He has the heart of a devil, and the brain of a fox. He will kill thee—if he can. Our Lady protect thee. The blessed Saints, may they watch over thee. *Adios, adios!* THY MAGDALENA.

“See—I have kissed the cross that I have made (X). I love thee, Juanito, as my heart tells me thou lovest me. *Adios!*”

The little Indian girl gave me this dear billet, and smiled when I kissed it, thinking, doubtless, of the vaquero to whom she was betrothed, and of whose skill as a horseman she chattered glibly as she sat by my side keeping the flies from my face.

Upon the third day His Excellency paid me a visit. He still limped, but told me that rheumatism had been exorcised by Pearson's strong drugs. As soon as we were alone he said abruptly: “Señor, this scrape of yours has cost me dear.”

He spoke quietly, but a smile flickered round the corners of his finely-cut mouth. I knew what he meant. Estrada and de Castañeda were almost certain to espouse Carrillo's cause. I made no reply, having none pat, and His Excellency touched my hand.

“After all,” he added kindly, “the gain, perhaps, outweighs the loss. One loyal friend is worth a regiment of false ones.”

With such words he turned my respect and admiration for him into a warmer sentiment. Doubtless he had taken my measure, and clothed my nakedness—for I was feeling very lonely and ill—with a mantle cut by

an artist and fashioned out of the stoutest cloth. Saint Martin, you may be sure, lined the half of the cloak he gave to the beggar with the silver of kindly speech.

Then he told me that de Castañeda had left Monterey in Estrada's company; that Castro was at the mission of San Miguel; that word had come to him (Alvarado) that Bustamente would support the victor, and that accordingly he had sent a despatch to Castro to win or lose a battle within fifteen days.

"Would that I were with him," I groaned, for confinement proved irksome to me.

Alvarado smiled.

"We will march together," he said cheerily. "Did you see any good land up north?"

"Did I? Yes; thousands of leagues."

After that His Excellency honoured me with a daily visit, and finding many topics of mutual interest—politics, literature, but never love—we soon became friends. Padre Quijas brought word from Vallejo, who still held aloof, sending his brother Salvador as proxy with a company of soldiers. The burly friar set soberly to work to make me a Catholic. I could not help laughing when he expounded the doctrines and dogmas of Rome, for I had been through the Tractarian Movement at Oxford, and was well prepared to meet him in argument. Alvarado, listening to us, said that Quijas was a better swordsman than a logician, and the irate Quijas retorted, not unreasonably, that the Señor Gobernador was an iconoclast in danger of perdition.

"I break no idols," said Alvarado; "but if they fall I do not set them up again."

This proves that Alvarado was at heart a reformer

even in matters spiritual. I have never met a man less tolerant of abuse, no matter how cunningly masked, nor one who despised more intensely humbug and hypocrisy.

Quijas obtained permission from the father superior of his order to march south with us. His hand was itching for the sword-hilt, while he talked solemnly of souls to be shrived upon the field of battle. Alvarado said little, but he made journeys to San Juan and Santa Clara, and neglected nothing that might ensure the success of what he hoped would prove a bloodless campaign.

Upon March 25th we took the field with a small body of soldiers and some *civicos*, and upon the 31st reached Buenavista, where we learned of Castro's victory at San Buenaventura. Of this famous battle it is sufficient to say that after "two days' continual firing"—I quote from Castro's report—the abajeños fled under cover of night. One man was killed: one man to an intolerable deal of powder burned. Castro captured seventy fugitives, with muskets and other arms, and took possession of the pueblo of Los Angeles upon April Fools' Day.

We marched on very leisurely, eating a great deal of beef, and drinking many gallons of "tinto." I confess that I was disappointed with the turn matters were taking. My strength and energy had returned, and with them a burning desire to distinguish myself in the eyes of my chief. He always laughed when I talked in a Cambyses' vein, and, writing many letters, assured me that the pen was mightier than the sword. As his secretary, I saw not only the letters he sent but those he received, and amongst them one from the alcalde of

Santa Barbara, in which mention was made of Lettice and Courtenay. "She has bewitched us all," he wrote, "and I learn that Santiago Castañeda is mad for love of her. He is here with his slit cheek——"

Castañeda in Santa Barbara! The news troubled me.

A letter from Courtenay explained this and other matters:

"MY DEAR JACK" (he wrote), "we heard of your duel with de Castañeda from the man himself. I must say that he speaks handsomely of you. The gossips have it—and Castañeda hinted as much to me—that the pretty Magdalena has enslaved you. She seems to have a high spirit—so beware, old John, beware! As for the scene in the church, the Mexican admits 'twas humiliating for him, but he adds that the marriage was one of convenience on both sides, and that for his part he has nothing to regret—except, I should imagine, that hideous scar upon his face. He is monstrous civil to Letty and me——"

This letter puzzled me. The Mexican's civility implied a motive. And I knew that Courtenay could be imposed upon: large blue eyes, I have noted, of a peculiar azure tint hold much dust. In a word, I was uneasy; the more so because duty chained me to my chief. I took Quijas into my confidence, but he cooled apprehension with common-sense, laying stress upon Letty's modesty and decorum, and the fact that the multitude of her admirers would prove a body-guard in case of need.

We joined forces with José Castro, and I accompanied Salvador Vallejo, who with his company was sent on in

advance to occupy San Juan Capistrano. We had His Excellency's instructions to use, if possible, *conciliatory* means, but Salvador sent the abajeños a message saying that he would hang all who did not instantly surrender. They fled—to a man; and the soldiers, with drawn bayonets, rushed helter-skelter through the mission buildings, which held nothing more dangerous than some barrels of aguardiente!

The battle of Las Flores followed: a battle in a band-box. We had three interviews with Carlos Carrillo; hot encounters, but nothing was spilled save wine. Finally, upon April 23rd, a treaty was signed, by the terms of which Vallejo was recognised as comandante-general, and Alvarado, virtually, as Governor, although it was agreed that for the time being Carrillo should act with him, pending the action of the departmental assembly. We then retraced our steps to San Fernando, eating, drinking, and making merry. I could see that Alvarado had Carrillo beneath his thumb, but, while we were calling together a convention of representatives from the different pueblos, José Antonio Carrillo and Pio Pico arrived, and, after more talk, constrained Don Carlos to return with them to Los Angeles.

“*Carajo!*” said Alvarado to me, “we shall have our work to do all over again. My uncle is a schoolboy. But José Antonio and Pico shall smart for these pranks.”

It was plain by now that Don Carlos had proved himself a man of straw, possessed of none of the qualities necessary in a ruler. Alvarado, on the other hand, had commended himself to all by his suavity and resolution. But, of course, as my chief had predicted, the pranks began again, and finally led to the arrest of the chief

offenders. We hunted for them high and low, finding Pio Pico tucked away beneath the *madre* of the *tapanco* (garret; the madre is the big mother beam that supports the roof), and José Antonio under a pile of hides. Pico was in his shirt, pallid and cold with terror, but José Antonio laughed gaily, and said that *hide* and seek was a sorry game for grown men. Well, Villavicencio and I escorted these hidalgos to Santa Barbara, where at last I met Letty and Courtenay.

We had got into town late, but, learning that a dance was being held at the house of the de la Guerras, and that Letty would surely be present, I slipped into the suit that Vallejo had given me and joined the revellers. The big *sala* was filled with dancers, but I could not see Letty, and was about to question my host, when Courtenay came up from behind and slapped me on the back. Lord! how glad I was to see him!

"Where is Letty?" said I.

"She is on the verandah with Castañeda."

I stared at him in amazement.

"Surely you know what gossip says of this squire of dames?"

"I don't believe a word of it. He's an accomplished fellow and a very good chap. He has forgiven you, as I wrote you."

He laughed, and ran off to dance with a very languishing dame. Alvarado was at the other end of the room, so I paid him my respects. I was afire with impatience to see Letty; but he laid his hand on my arm. We walked together into the patio.

"Are you ready to take the road again?" he asked.

"Yes," said I.

"Will you ride to Sonoma?"

"At once, your Excellency."

He smiled.

"There is no hurry. But I am minded to send our prisoners to my uncle. José Castro wishes to despatch them to the——devil. They shall go instead to the comandante."

His lip flickered with humour, and I recalled some stories about Vallejo's cruelty, and remembered what he had said about the Jew, Solomon.

"And now," he added, tapping me on the cheek, "enjoy yourself. You cannot go north yet. We must celebrate these glorious victories first."

I found my cousin and Castañeda on the front porch. The two chairs seemed to me unnecessarily close together.

"Letty," said I, "what welcome have you for me?"

She rose at once with a joyful cry, and opened her arms. A sister could have hugged a brother no harder. When she released me, Castañeda stepped forward, bowed, and offered his hand and a courteous phrase, both of which I was constrained to accept. The Mexican left me alone with Letty. We sat down, and she gave me her slender hand.

"Dear John," she said fervently, "how glad I am to see you!"

"What! is the honeymoon over?"

Perhaps the question was indiscreet, but I had played gooseberry so often. She ignored it and said quietly: "I have missed you." Then, at her request, I recited my adventures, and she told me in return what had befallen her; but of Courtenay she said little, and of Castañeda still less, which alarmed me, for she was

naturally of a frank and ingenuous disposition. The de la Guerra punch, however, unlocked old Mark's lips, and when Letty had gone to her bed, I got at the marrow of the matter.

"He has some of Sir Marmaduke's blood in his veins," said the Captain, filling the famous meerschaum we had given him. Then, in answer to a hot ejaculation from me, he continued: "It is nothing serious, and this work of ours is deadly monotonous. Ay, ay, it'll pass."

"What will pass?" I demanded impatiently.

"This love of pleasure, Jack. He leaves his wife too much alone, but dammy, I love the lad."

"Nobody can help doing that," I replied moodily. "Hang it! do you love Castañeda too?"

The old fellow answered rather sheepishly that the Mexican was not without charm, and I retorted that as much and more could be said of a rattlesnake.

"Well," said he, with a sly wink, "you know that the best of women—God bless 'em—have a weakness for sinners."

A protest would have been wasted. During the week that followed I spent many hours with Letty, and de Castañeda gave me sea room; when we met, smile encountered smile. The *Heron* sailed south again, and Courtenay promised that he would give less time to pleasure (which I found with relief to be abstract, not concrete) and more to duty. Old Jaynes—with an Englishman's respect for rank—made the young gentleman's labours as light as possible, humouring and pampering a temperament that needed drastic treatment. Beneath soft and smiling skies Master Courtenay bid fair to become a selfish epicurean.

And yet, who am I to throw even a pebble at him? If he worked too little, I assuredly worked too hard, consumed by ambition. My heart was in Magdalena's keeping, but my mind was busied with a thousand schemes. Nor did I write to the maid, but my name often figured in Alvarado's despatches to his uncle, and I may not repeat the kind things he said of me: giving me, indeed, credit that was not my due. Unhappily, as will appear shortly, others were in correspondence with the autocrat of Sonoma, and some of them doubtless marked the attention I paid poor Letty, and drew therefrom conclusions most unwarrantable. I had smarted sorely on her account, and was to smart still more, but after a different fashion.

About the middle of May Alvarado sent me north in charge of the prisoners. "Beware of José Antonio," he said at parting. "I doubt not that he will try to persuade the comandante that a jackass may be a lion." (He was speaking of Carlos Carrillo.)

"José is a sly dog," said I.

"For that reason he goes north. He shall not worry these domestic fowls any longer, these stuffed chickens who only gobble and crow."

"Shall I return here, your Excellency?"

He laughed and held up a lean forefinger.

"You will return to Monterey at once. Nor can you expect the comandante to entertain you. Magdalena is in his care."

I looked glum, for he laughed again.

"Don't despair. There are many maidens in Alta California."

"None so fair as Magdalena," I replied.

"She is an Estrada, my friend," he said pointedly.

"Your Excellency, I have her word for it that she is a Bandini."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE QUICKSANDS OF SANTA MARIA.

NEXT day we took the northern road, and after climbing the Gaviota Mountain and passing through a very wild and sterile country, lay for the night at the mission of Santa Ynez, where we were most hospitably entertained by the good padres. Not far from this place a misadventure befel me. I had supped well, and was chatting with José Antonio Carrillo (who for a prisoner certainly made *bonne mine à mauvais jeu*) beneath the old mission arches, when a mestizo rode up on a horse lathered with sweat, and doffed his sombrero to my companion.

"Who is that?" said I, for the man had a noticeable face of the colour of old mahogany, illumined by a pair of black, beady eyes, the cruel and inquisitive eyes of a rat, deep set beneath coarse shaggy hair worn, as fashion then dictated, *à la furia*.

"I do not know," replied Carrillo. "*Madre de Dios!* he is ugly as sin."

The fellow dismounted, and then—seemingly for no reason—brutally kicked the poor jaded beast in the stomach. Carrillo snickered, for these Californians, so kind to humans, are no lovers of animals; and whether his snicker fired my wrath, or whether, which is more

probable, some subtle instinct of antipathy possessed me, I cannot tell, but without thinking I sprang forward and hit the rascal so hard on the ear that he fell to the ground. However, he was on his feet again in a jiffy, and drawing his puñal, attacked me fiercely. Whereat my companion also rose, and in a loud voice bade the man give pause, threatening him with a score of punishments. The fellow bowed humbly, sheathed his knife in his boot, and slunk away.

When I thanked Carrillo, he said, gravely, that a half-breed never forgives an injury, and fears nothing on earth save the lash. "You are my gaoler," he concluded, "but I trust, señor, that no harm will come of this."

His concern touched me, and in company we smoked many cigaritos, talking well into the small hours, for I found this southerner a cheery and clever companion. Under his sombrero—so Alvarado had told me—lay the brains of the abajeños, and before starting His Excellency had bid me beware of a subtle tongue. "Be sure," said he, "that Carrillo will fish patiently and use many baits." Bearing this in mind, I left politics alone. We left the mission next day at an early hour, and travelled leisurely through a pretty, well-wooded country till we came to the Santa Maria river, where we camped for the night upon the banks of what was considered then, as now, the most treacherous stream in Alta California. At that season of the year the channel was almost dry, yet, where the water flowed, a cunning eye might detect smooth, slimy masses of shifting sand, crossing which a horse or steer would sink to the belly and surely perish, unless rescued at

the end of a stout lariat. Here, our larder needing replenishing, and the river bottom being alive with game, I shouldered my rifle and sauntered down stream till I came to a place where the river forked. Upon the left bank was a bluff, the end of a spur of the foothills, and on the crest of the bluff, gloriously outlined against an opaline sky, stood a fine blacktail buck, fat as butter, with a head of horns that looked like a thick bush for the number of its points. I stalked him successfully, the sea breeze setting from him to me; and when I pulled trigger he lurched forward and fell crashing down the face of the bluff, as if sensible of the propriety of giving a hungry man as little trouble as possible. Now, between me and my quarry lay the river, into which I waded, holding my rifle above my head. But I had not gone a dozen paces before I found myself sinking in the soft sand, and after wallowing in this cursed quagmire, I soon realised that I was like to come to an inglorious end unless help was at hand. I yelled loud as Stentor, but, being far from camp, had but slim hope that my friends would hear me. And then, as I was straining my ears for a distant shout, I heard from the other bank a diabolical chuckle. I am not more superstitious than my neighbours, but, on my word, I thought that the fiend himself was mocking me. Such laughter, to a man in deadly peril, seemed inhuman. Yet, had it not been for that dreadful, triumphant "Ha! ha! ha!" I believe I had sunk, for it stirred my pulses to the most frantic efforts, and by dint of kicking and rolling I presently, to my great joy, struck bottom and soon lay, panting and exhausted but safe, upon a firm gravelly bar. Now I confess that I

was badly scared, and, lying on the bar, I wondered whether the laughter had been a trick of fancy. My doubts on this point were increasing, when I heard the crack of a pistol and also the "zip" of a bullet singing by my ear, and burying itself in the earth not four inches to the left of my head. Although spent with my previous exertions, I began to roll again toward the thick sage brush and was tumbling into cover, when something like a slung shot seemed to smite my head, and my senses forsook me. I reckon that I must have lain there for half-an-hour. Then I became aware that I was still alive, although desperately sick and giddy. I had wit enough to crawl into the brush, and presently feeling for my wound found it on my head. The bullet had slit the skin, merely grazing the scalp, so after all I was more frightened than hurt. Doubtless my enemy—whoever he might be—counting me dead and fearing the treacherous sands, had left me to the buzzards. Soon the giddiness and the nausea left me, and in time I reached camp, a sorry-looking object, but none the worse for my misadventure.

José Carrillo, while dressing my wound (for he had skill in such matters), said that I was surely not destined to die in my boots.

The night following we lay at another mission, that of San Luis Obispo, so called from a mountain near the *pueblo* whose peak bears a curious resemblance to a bishop's mitre. This mission, one of the oldest in California, was charmingly situated upon rising ground, whence on three sides great pastures swept away in lovely undulations to the blue mountains that encircled

them. I walked in the padre's garden, a pleasaunce fragrant with old-fashioned flowers—Castilian roses, St. Joseph's lilies, and the like—and marked many herbs and simples, some silvery olive-trees, and a long, cool, vine-clad arbour, called an *emparado*. Here my wound was dressed again by a padre, who pronounced it to be healing with the first intention. Here, also, the chief people called upon our prisoners and openly condoled with them. 'Twas plain that John Charity was regarded as a pestilent fellow, and had it not been for the fierce aspect of my *soldados* (whose valour, to tell the truth, lay chiefly in their tongues' tip), a rescue might have been attempted. The prisoners, whom I had treated as friends, gave me their parole in exchange for certain amenities, but I made it clearly understood that anything in the nature of a scrimmage would lead to a massacre. In the teeth of this ultimatum I encountered more smiles than scowls.

After leaving the town of the bishop we approached the domains of Don Narciso Estrada, the lovely and fertile rancho Santa Margarita. To the right and left of us towered the Santa Lucia Mountains, the Trossachs of Southern California, and between these lay the Salinas Valley, studded with sycamores and huge live oaks, and knee-deep in lush clover and alfileria. I began to understand why Castañeda had been so keen to marry a girl for whom he had no love; for indeed, to gain a title to so many and such fat acres a man might be tempted to make a covenant with the devil, let alone a young and handsome señorita. However, the sight of Magdalena's heritage pricked my pride till it smarted. The barrier between a penniless

son of a yeoman and the heiress of the Santa Margarita seemed greater than the vast bulwark of mountains that lay between the Salinas and the Pacific. And so, for some time, the train of my thoughts burrowed into a gloomy tunnel, travelling none the less at a speed that promised me daylight, for I was sensible that I had my sweet lady's love, and also that Venus is ever kind to those who serve her faithfully and ardently.

Of course, José Carrillo was cognisant of what had passed in Monterey, and presently he turned his knowledge to account.

"Narciso Estrada is accounted one of the richest men in the country."

"I can well believe it, señor."

"The old fox is on the fence."

"The nearer to the grapes."

"Do you know why he betrothed his daughter to Castañeda?"

"The Mexican is of kin to Bustamente."

"True; but there are other reasons—reasons you can guess."

I understood him perfectly. From what had passed between us, I could no longer doubt that Castañeda was in league with the abajeños. These gentlemen were the aristocrats, the cavaliers, so to speak, of Alta California, and, like them, intensely proud, arrogant, conceited, and ignorant of the true trend of events. José Carrillo was silent for a few minutes, then he said, slyly: "You have engaged the interest of the most powerful men in the North, señor, but had you landed at San Diego, or Los Angeles, *quien sabe*, you might now——"

"Have been a prisoner," I retorted bluntly, for I could smell powder in such talk.

"A thousand pardons. I had no intention to offend. You came here in search of Fortune, you and your brother, Señor Valencia, and I frankly hope that you will find the lady. But I am not speaking beyond my brief when I profoundly regret that you did not land at San Diego, where we could have found you a rancho and a handsome wife to boot."

To this I made no reply. 'Twas plain he wished to bribe me. I remember that I marvelled why John Charity was seemingly regarded as a personage by these Californians. The secret leaked out later. Honest Jaynes, it seemed, had descanted freely of the glories of the Valence family, of the wealth of Sir Marmaduke, of his friendship with the late king, and so on and so forth. It was very generally believed, both at Monterey and Santa Barbara, that we were duly accredited agents from the Court of Saint James; spies, in fact, overlooking the Canaan of the Pacific.

Soon after we rode up to the ranch-house, and were received by Don Narciso with much ceremony and many protestations of esteem. The prisoners, being persons of quality, were made equally welcome and assigned good rooms. I noted, however, that at John Charity the old gentleman cocked a curious eye. I was bound to Sonoma, where his daughter was the guest of Vallejo, and he knew that with me duty and inclination marched abreast. I also marked that he talked apart with Carrillo, and drew many conclusions not flattering to my host's loyalty. Not a doubt remained in my mind that Alvarado, even in Monterey,

was encompassed with spies and traitors. At dinner, none the less, I was seated at Estrada's right, and he showed me much attention, taking wine with me a number of times, and entreating my opinion upon the quality of the liquors. Later, as we sat smoking upon the verandah, he engaged me in talk, and conversed amicably in a voice singularly sweet and flexible. I realised for the first time that he was the father of Magdalena, and did not forget that flies are caught with molasses.

"These family quarrels"—he was something of a euphuist—"are the curse of California. They give educated strangers, like yourself, señor, a false impression of the people and the country."

"The country is the finest on God's footstool, Don Narciso, and as for this quarrelling you speak of, egad! the best man has won, and now we shall have peace."

"You are young," he observed drily, "and naturally of a sanguine disposition."

"Well," I retorted, thinking of Magdalena, "this world would be a sorry place without youth and hope."

"Hope has starved many a pretty gentleman. I prefer certainty."

"And I too, Don Narciso."

I made a shift to catch his eye, but in vain. As the devil would have it, we were interrupted by Estrada's major-domo. The old fox—as Carrillo well named him—was about to break cover, and I felt that I had missed a run. But, after I had retired to a somewhat evil-smelling, windowless bedroom, and was pulling off

my heavy riding-boots, he came discreetly to my door, asked civilly to be admitted, and, entering, assured me that his business would not take long in the telling. In my egregious vanity and inexperience of the Latin race, I believed that he felt more kindly toward me, and that my position in Alvarado's favour had modified his opinion of a young man whom he had no reason to suppose other than an adventurer. In short, I hoped that he had come to claim me as a son-in-law, wherein I was not much out, although approaching a sound conclusion from the side of folly rather than that of wisdom. For to my amazement, after pledging me to secrecy, he coolly offered me Magdalena's hand upon two conditions: the release of the prisoners in my charge, and the rupture of my relations with Alvarado. I was red-hot with rage before the words were out of his mouth, but I managed to say quietly: "Anything else, señor?"

"Is not that enough?" he demanded insolently.

"You would give your daughter to a traitor. But the señorita does not love traitors, as you know——"

"You are a very foolish young man."

"No doubt."

"José Carrillo is a fool too."

"If he advised you to traffic with an Englishman's honesty, yes."

At the word Englishman he laughed grimly. Then he said with a sneer on his thin lips: "The Señor Valence is not so particular."

"What!" I gasped.

"His sympathies are with us. He is of the nobility as we are. You look incredulous, señor; but ask your

friend, ask him, I say. And we have promised to protect his interests."

I was silent, overcome by what he said. For I dared not contradict him. Then I told him that Courtenay had sworn no allegiance to Alvarado, that he was free to choose his side; and yet the fact that he had so chosen without a word with me burnt like acid. Possibly the old Don fathomed my thoughts, for he added angrily: "Juan Bautista is using you as a tool; a spade wherewith to dig your grave and his own. D——n him!"

He was certainly angrier with himself than me. These Dons seldom plead for favours. He was "a beggar who had never begged before," and never would again—to me.

"Señor Don Narciso," said I, "you make it hard for me to remember that you are my host."

I had flicked him on the raw, for he drew himself up with great hauteur, bowed, apologised, and bade me good-night. When he had gone I began to laugh. Latin honour tickled Anglo-Saxon humour. That he had offered his daughter in exchange for my loyalty seemed to the Don a ha'penny matter; but a slight to a guest curved his backbone into an abject bow.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE WAY OF A MAID WITH A MAN.

WE reached Sonoma on June 3rd. Vallejo hemmed and hawed when I inquired after the health of the

Señorita Estrada, and I was assigned a room in the house of his brother Salvador, which stands at the corner of the plaza, a poor lodging, neither clean nor comfortable. Later, Quijas told me, with a broad grin upon his red face, that he had encountered Tia Maria Luisa, and had learned from her that Magdalena was sick in bed of a fever. From the twinkle in the burly friar's eye one might infer that the fever was of the kind that in these latter days would be treated homœopathically to a successful issue—*similia similibus curantur*. I supped that night at Vallejo's table, and in the *sala* afterwards paid my court to the stout aunt.

"Ay, ay!" she exclaimed, holding up her fat little hands, "these fevers, Don Juan, are terrible things, terrible. *La pobrecita* was running about the patio not three hours ago, just before you came."

Her small eyes twinkled with malice and slyness.

"Señora," said I, capturing and kissing her left hand, "let me comfort you. These fevers come and go, as you say, like travellers. The señorita may be running about the patio again three minutes after I have left."

She held up her fan to hide a smile.

"And when do you depart, señor?" she asked softly.

"This instant," I replied, "if I believed honestly that my going would affect the health or happiness of your niece."

Tia Maria Luisa snatched away her hand, turned up her eyes, crossed herself, and muttered something that assuredly was not a benediction. Indeed, so obvious was it that she counted me an enemy to be

held at arm's length that I made no further attempt to win her favour. Moreover, Vallejo's wife eyed me coldly. It has been said that her sympathies were with her kinsmen, the abajeños, and the part I had played in their capture was doubtless displeasing to this kind and gentle lady. Martino Castro was at her father's house, so practically I had no friend amongst the women whose services I could command at a pinch. None the less, fortune smiled on me, for that evening as I was crossing the plaza a pretty Indita slipped a billet into my hand:

"I am imprisoned" (wrote Magdalena) "in the small room in the north-east corner of the house. Do not attempt to see me. But be at the big sycamore below Salvador Vallejo's house to-night at ten."

The note required no answer, but as I slipped a piece of silver into the Indita's palm I asked how my dear fared. The graceful creature laughed coquettishly, and said that the señorita had eaten a sorry dinner. Her sparkling eyes assured me that an intrigue is meat and drink for maid and mistress.

At the appointed hour I sallied forth, wrapped in my mantle, and my sombrero pulled far over my eyes. 'Twas pitch dark, but I made my way to the sycamore and sat down on one of its big roots. And here I sat, cursing the delay, for nearly half-an-hour, till my eyes—for I was dog-tired—grew heavy as lead. Perhaps the lids fell, for I saw nothing, heard nothing, till a light touch upon my shoulder sped drowsiness. Then I dimly discerned the Indita standing beside me, veiled

in a rebozo. Bitterly disappointed, I spoke sharply :
“ You are late.”

She murmured softly : “ *No viene dia que no tenga su tarde.*”

“ Well, what message have you ? ”

“ Are you awake, señor ? ”

“ Yes, impudence.”

“ The sand is still in your eyes—*no* ? ”

She mocked me so that I tried to tweak her hair—
twin braids that hung far below the waist. The girl
ducked cleverly and laughed. Lo ! ’twas the laugh of
Magdalena.

“ *Querida !* ” I exclaimed, opening my arms.

“ Don Juan Charity, do not touch me. You are a
caballero. See, I forbid you to come nearer than
that,” and she stuck her sweet cheek some ten inches
from my own. “ *Ojala !* I have staked my reputation
to come here, so—behave ! And, besides, I am angry
with you ”

“ Good Lord ! what have I done ? Thou dost chill
me with thy frigid ’usted.”

She had slipped aside the rebozo, and I was able to see
her face, which looked very pale and pensive by starlight.

“ I heard of your doings at Santa Barbara. I am not
your wife yet, señor, and I warn you that I am jealous.
Virgen Santisima ! How jealous I am ! No, no, no.
Back—or I leave you.”

She was bewitching in the Indita’s short skirt and
camisole ; and my heart was hungry for kisses, yet I
dared not disobey. She continued :

“ You are too kind, too cousinly, to the lovely Señora
Valence.”

"She is my cousin."

"You say 'my' as if you owned her."

"Magdalena, don't be foolish. Think of the precious time we are wasting."

"You want to sleep again. *Dios!* You could not keep awake when I was coming to you."

"How didst thou escape from Tia Maria?"

"*Ay!* You are clever to change the subject. My Indita is lying in my bed with her face in the pillow. If my aunt should come in she will see nothing but two black braids. We removed the grating, Juanita and I, and then I slipped through the window. And all for love of a faithless Englishman."

And then she laughed that beguiling laugh of hers with the tears in it; pearls in a ripple of diamonds. And I knew intuitively that she had suffered, hearing idle tales of Letty and me. And accordingly I was so sorry for her that my voice trembled when I spoke.

"Believe me, Magdalena, I am true to thee; my heart is all thine. Oh! my dear, nothing came from thee to me save the trade wind that blew glad and strong from the north."

"Ah!" she murmured, "did not the sob of the sea tell thee that I was yearning for thee?"

Now that my eyes were used to the starlight I could see her plainly, and marked with a pang a thinner cheek, a slighter figure. She seemed rather shadow than substance; a creature of fancy, a sprite from the world unseen. And with my eyes gazing into the velvety depths of hers I told myself, with a sense of impending evil, that she was indeed of the past,

a daughter of yesterday, whereas I, big, clumsy, ambitious, was the incarnation of to-day. And so thinking, a tear trickled down my cheek, for my heart was twisted so cruelly that I gasped with the pain of it. And then Magdalena threw her arms about my neck and kissed me, entreating my pardon, and whispering a thousand endearments—words that do not lend themselves to our cold northern tongue, words that are as flames of fire.

The passion of it dismayed me. Compared with this love, the love of a maid such as Letty had been is as the flow of the silver Itchen to the arrowy rushes of the Rhone. And I was borne upon this swirling, seething tide as a log is whirled to the sea. And then, as a log is tossed upon a sand-bar, I suddenly found myself released from her clinging arms and stranded on a silence.

“Juanito,” she murmured timidly, “thou dost think me unmaidenly?”

“No,” I replied heavily. “No, ’tis not that, *querida*, but I would—I would——”

I stammered. She finished the phrase bitterly.

“Thou wouldst have me different—*no*? Like the English daisy.”

Her mouth drooped piteously. Her moods distracted me.

“Magdalena,” said I, “leave the daisy alone, thou tiger-lily. For thy sake, not for mine, I would that thy blood flowed more calmly. Fever and fret will undo thee.”

She laid her head with a sigh upon my shoulder. Truly a man is humbled rather than exalted by such

love as this, poured out in fullest measure. For unless he be fool or devil he must be sensible of his own unworthiness. And yet, if he strive to become worthy, it will be well with him; but if he accept such a gift in a vainglorious spirit, 'twere better for him and for the woman that they had never been born.

As she leaned trembling against me, I reflected that the way of a man with a maid is ever varying, a game played, so to speak, by misrule. And then I recalled Shakespeare's lines: "That which is the strength of their amity shall prove the immediate author of their variance." Had she loved me less our love-passages might have proved smoother.

Presently we fell to talking of the future, and then her wit and foresight amazed me, for in Latin countries the women, as a rule, meddle not with what pertains to men. 'Twas plain that she held the claims of the rival factions in some contempt—a difference 'twixt tweedledum and tweedledee. Finally, as her head lay upon my shoulder, and her soft breath stirred the hair about my ear, she whispered: "Juanito, thou dost fear for me because my blood flows too quickly. I fear for thee, *querido*, because thou art easily fooled."

"Who is fooling me, Magdalena?"

"Thy handsome cousin for one, the Señor Valencia."

She could read in my face that I thought her jealous of my friend.

"Ay, I am not jealous of *him*; but I do not like him. He is shallow, a trifler, and he imposes on thee; for that I hate him," and I heard her small teeth meet in a significant click. Nor would she listen to my defence of Courtenay, but interrupted me with gusts of light

laughter; and when I persisted, growing warm, she laid her fingers on my mouth and entreated silence.

"How much dost thou love me, Juanito?"

I answered the question after a fashion that did not satisfy her.

"No, no; thy kisses are sweet. But tell me—wouldst thou make a sacrifice for my sake?"

"What dost thou want?" I asked.

"Ay, how cold thy voice is! I want, I want—thee."

"But you have me, sweetheart."

"A part of thee, yes. But not all. Oh! Juanito mio, my heart tells me that Alvarado and his ambition will come, nay, has come between us."

I was silent.

"*Virgen Santisima*," she sighed, "it is so."

"Magdalena, I have no home to offer thee. I must work, dearest, as other men work, and thou must wait."

"There is no must about it," she retorted, pouting. From the corner of her eyes flashed a glance compounded of disdain, impatience, disappointment, and love. Oh! she was a witch, a witch. I began to build with words the castle wherein I hoped to lodge this fair enchantress.

"*Tate, tate*," she exclaimed, "how little thou dost understand me. By the time thou hast built such a cage as that, the bird may be flown. No, no, not flown, but dead. Ay, how ambitious thou art! For me, I want but little to eat and drink and wear, but I must have love—plenty of it. But thou, like Alvarado, dost hold love to be a pastime. Fool, fool, not to know that it is all, all of life."

Was I impatient with her? Perhaps. I begged her to be more explicit, and at last she put her desire into words.

She entreated me, in fine, to leave her kind kinsman's service. I protested in vain. She was obstinate.

"Thou must choose between him and me."

I confess that the unreason of the choice angered me. It is true that she did not ask me to join the *abajenos*, but she beseeched me, with tender words and caresses, to play the part most abhorrent to a man of spirit—that of spectator when grave issues are at stake. I know now that her amazing instinct was not at fault. That she saw only too clearly that I was the tool of a politician, that she was thinking, sweet soul, not of herself but of me, and using a woman's lever with a woman's guile. But—God help me!—in my conceit I laid rude hands upon her intuitions.

"I would not tempt thee to dishonour. No, no. I do not ask thee to play the spy."

"A spy!" I interrupted hotly.

"Ay, a spy, Señor Innocence. For what other purpose, think you, were you sent here? For what other purpose are you here now? All is fair in war, yes; but this is not war; it is the petty quarrel of relations; and with such matters outsiders had better not meddle. Do not speak; I shall finish and—go. To a man is the present; to a woman belong the past and the future. And 'tis of the future I speak now. I have heard these matters discussed ever since I was a baby, the child of a house"—her voice sank—"of a house divided against itself. Divided, too, into four camps; some of my kinsmen are true Californians. Alvarado was once of them, a patriot, a born leader. Yes, I know that he failed, but he might have tried again. Then there are those who favour the powers that be, the Mexican rule—

rotten to the core. And then there are those, like Vallejo, who are looking eastward, plotting to deliver their country into the hands of the Americans, who will despoil them. And, lastly, there are those who are intriguing with England. Alvarado thinks that his secret has been kept. It has leaked from every lip—save perhaps yours, señor.”

Her use of the “’usted” moved me more than the recital of facts already in my possession.

“And what will be the end of these intrigues? Ah, *quien sabe!* But I think that Alvarado will sacrifice everything and everybody to his ambition. And Vallejo will fare no better. And in the end we shall all be swept away.”

She covered her face with her hands. I could say nothing, although I longed to comfort her. But when I touched her she sprang lightly aside, and her voice was cold and clear as the voice of a sibyl.

“*Adios, Don Juan.*”

She ran nimbly from me, but I soon overtook her, and in my arms her anger melted. It is often so, and the man flatters himself that he has prevailed, because indeed the flesh is stronger than the spirit. Then I escorted her as far as the plaza, and from a discreet distance saw her reach the sanctuary of her room.

For an hour or more I paced up and down. The man who holds happiness in his grasp in the guise of such a maid as Magdalena may well tremble with fear as well as with delight. In cooler mood I brought myself to believe that she had tempted me to dishonour, and the belief rankled. Also, the word “spy” was not to be exorcised. Gradually, however, I began

to tread a gayer measure, and as my pace mended I left behind doubt and perplexity. Men run from such foes, leaving them with their women. Before I went to bed that night my mind was made up. I would play my own game to the end, play it off my own bat, asking counsel of none. I told myself that in such matters a man must be, so to speak, his own chronometer, telling himself the time o' day. With me it was high noon, and the shadows were hardly visible.

CHAPTER XV.

OF FRIENDS AND ENEMIES.

NEXT day I returned to Monterey, according to my instructions, leaving Magdalena in the care of Vallejo and Tia Maria Luisa. Nor did I see my dear again, although I wrote her a long letter, which I entrusted to the Indita. Later, I learned that she and the good aunt were sent south to Santa Barbara, Magdalena returning to her father's house, and Tia Maria Luisa paying a visit to the Bustons, of whom mention has been made. Meantime, I heard from Letty and Courtenay. They had been as far south as San Diego, slowly collecting their cargo of hides and selling their wares at the different ports. Courtenay wrote that Jaynes was at Tia Maria's feet, a victim—so he said—to the *beaux yeux de sa casette* (for the dame had fat acres in her own right and many gold pieces safely hid in the *tapanco* of her house). But Letty added in a postscript that 'twas the sight of Ben Buston's

happiness and the red-headed babies which had stirred the ancient mariner's heart. Then there was a long epistle from my dear mother, exhaling love, lavender, and anxiety. Austen Valence, it seemed, had recovered of his wound, and had taken to a rakehelly life that was playing the mischief with his purse and reputation. These letters I answered, but feared to write to Magdalena, knowing that if they fell into wrong hands they would breed trouble for my Rachel. Nor did she write; but, nightly, she came to me in my dreams—a gracious figure with love burning in her eyes. Why did I not find means to send her a message? I never suspected—fool that I was—her loneliness, perplexity, anxiety. How could she guess that I was working hard with nothing to sweeten labour save thoughts of her?

For I was quartered in Alvarado's house, acting as his secretary, and when I add that my master rose each day at four and gave sixteen hours to the service of his state, you may believe that 'twas no holiday life I was leading. Upon August 13th the *Catalina* dropped anchor in Monterey Bay, bringing despatches from Bustamente, and although Alvarado's title as chief executive was not at that time legally confirmed, none doubted now his powers.

That same afternoon, I remember, I ventured to speak of his love affairs, that of late had been somewhat neglected. He frowned.

"This is no time for marrying or giving in marriage. Well, señor, do you still wish to be a ranchero?"

I told him yes, descanting enthusiastically upon Arcadian joys. He listened courteously, and presently

sighed. Then, to my surprise, he said abruptly: "I presume you are prepared to swear allegiance to Mexico and to become a Catholic?"

My face fell. Alvarado smiled cynically.

"I think I can promise you as much land as you want—*now*."

The emphasis on the *now* was a dominant note of triumph.

"What is your English citizenship to you? And as for your conscience—is it not true that your countrymen leave such ballast at Cape Horn?"

I was on the rack. This man's eyes were as gimlets boring and twisting into my brain. Upon this stake, a rancho, I had pinned my hopes, my time, my labour.

"Your Excellency," I replied at length, "I thank you for your kindness to me, but I can neither swear allegiance to Mexico nor join your Church."

"Sleep over it. What of Magdalena Estrada?"

Never had I been so sorely tempted.

"Well, my friend?"

"My answer will be the same to-morrow."

"That is your last word?"

"It is."

I had risen from my chair, and so had he. Now that I had said "No," the situation seemed less strained. Alvarado held out his lean hand.

"Pardon me. I wished to test you. So much base coin passes current that for my life I cannot always detect the sterling metal. However, I never doubted what your answer would be."

I blushed, for Heaven knows what that answer might have been.

"You shall have land," he continued, "as soon as I am governor *de jure*, as well as *de facto*."

"And my foster-brother?"

"*Ojala!* Do you know that he plotted against me at Santa Barbara?"

I was covered with confusion, for I had hoped that Courtenay's dealings with the abajeños had escaped my patron's notice. Since, I have often wondered how and where he got his secret information.

"Cheer up," he said very kindly. "I will make a bargain with you, and with your foster-brother, whom frankly I would sooner have for friend than foe, although"—he looked at me queerly—"although to me he will be held as neither. But for your sake he shall have land too. And, in confidence, he and that pretty firebrand, his wife, will be safer and happier on a rancho. But you—I cannot spare you. I want you here, here by my side."

He began to pace up and down.

"You are ambitious, no? Yes, yes, I can read your heart. That is why I like you. And we, you and I, are not free to please ourselves. You take my meaning? This *lotos* life is not for us. I speak to you as a brother. If I can hold California for the Californians I shall do so. If that proves impossible"—he sighed, and finished his sentence very slowly—"if I am driven to it, mark you, I shall offer the bone over which these dogs are quarrelling to—England. And will England prove ungrateful to me—and to you?"

I was fired by his passionate interrogation. If it should be my good fortune to lend a hand in the hoisting of our flag; if I, a yeoman's son, should be

called on to take part in a game such as this, my life would cheerfully be staked on the issue. For I knew that California was even then what it has since been called—a Golden State, a principality worth the acceptance of that gracious maiden, her sweet Majesty Victoria. And I knew that Mexico had lost her grip of this treasure, and that time must take it from her and give it to the all-conquering Anglo-Saxon. Yet who can doubt to-day that had it been possible for us to have accomplished such a piece of work, the United States must have interfered, and a war would have ensued as the world has not seen, for the prize that Alvarado spoke of as a bone proved on inspection a gem of gems, a very Koh-i-noor, whose rays were destined to dazzle and attract all mankind.

Accordingly I pledged myself anew to my master, and professed myself ardent to follow such a leader. None the less his last words somewhat cooled my protestations.

“As for marriage, Martina Castro is constrained to wait. Be patient.”

Now a man who can control his own passions can control also the lives and passions of others. I confess that I was plastic as clay in the hands of this skilful and strong potter.

As I sat silent, he said in a low voice: “I have reason to know that the comisionado, Castellero, whom we may expect now in a few weeks, will bring two sets of papers; one set will confirm me governor, the other set will give California to Carlos Carrillo and his friends.”

“But”—I stammered in astonishment—“why and wherefore?”

"I may not be alive when Castellero lands," said Alvarado quietly. "My life was attempted in Los Angeles, and again at Santa Barbara. No, I did not mention it to you; the less said about such matters the better; but, Juan, they may slit your throat too, so be on your guard."

"Whom does your Excellency suspect?"

He spread out his hands, smiling.

"Castañeda would kill me for a tamale, so would Soto; so would"—he paused, eyeing me keenly—"so would Estrada."

"Magdalena's father?" I exclaimed.

"He is false as Judas. You must know as much."

My cheek flushed, for I had withheld from my chief what had passed between Estrada and me when I was in charge of the prisoners. I could not bring myself to prefer charges against my dear's father. Alvarado continued:

"All these Mexicans are scoundrels. They have not even the thieves' honour of being loyal to each other, as Narciso Estrada might find out to his cost. Well, *amigo*, we are playing for high stakes."

The use of the "we" touched me.

Later, when I was alone, I reflected bitterly that my gain must prove Magdalena's loss, for I could not doubt that when supreme authority was legally his, my chief would hold his enemies to strict account. And so thinking, a suspicion that had long festered in my mind became certainty. I identified Narciso Estrada with the taller of the two men whose plots I had overheard when lying snug in the gulch near Magdalena's window. Soto, of course, was the other. And now I was almost

equally well assured that Castañeda had been concerned in the attempt on my life, and, curiously enough, I had proof-presumptive of this within a few days. In acknowledgment of my services in taking the prisoners to Sonoma, Alvarado had presented me with a *caponera* of twenty-five horses, led by a beautiful *yegua pinta*, a calico piebald mare; and with this *caponera* was included the vaquero in charge, a Yaqui Indian from the plains of Sonora, Procopio by name. He was as cunning, pious, patient, and superstitious a fellow as could be found in the Californias; and not the least of his good qualities was a faithful affection for me. Now it was the Yaqui's duty to come to my bedside every morning. One day I marked a queer expression in his eyes.

"Don Juan," said he, "you are a man of many friends."

"I have enemies also, Procopio."

"'Twas of them I wished to speak, señor."

I could not help laughing as Procopio showed his teeth in an appreciative grin. It was typical of the Californian that he wished to spare my feelings, and preferred the *oratio obliqua*, so to speak, of the Latin race to plain Saxon directness of speech.

"You had a narrow escape at Santa Maria, no? Well, the man who fired that bullet, señor, is here, in Monterey."

"Good," said I, with interest. "His name?"

"Cosmé Servin, the *mozo* of Don Santiago de Castañeda, who is first cousin to the devil," and Procopio piously crossed himself. I could see that he had more to say, and he continued softly: "I have cast six

bullets, señor, and have dipped them all in holy water, and marked each with the blessed cross. One is for Cosmé, because he too is a devil, and the others——”

“Yes—the others.”

“There are many devils, Don Juan. Ah! you laugh, señor, but 'tis well for you that I'm an honest man and a good Catholic.”

“How do you know that Cosmé Servin fired that shot at me?”

Procopio laughed slily and spread out his long thin fingers, the fingers of an Autolycus.

“He and I are courting the same girl, señor, Eustachia Bonilla. She loves me, the dear one, but she hates Cosmé, who is beast as well as devil.”

Cosmé seemingly was fool as well, for he had bragged to the girl of what he had done.

“He says,” murmured Procopio, “that if he had dared to cross the quicksands he would have used the puñal. *Ojala!* he didn't dip his bullet into holy water.”

I gave him some silver, and told him to keep his ears open and his mouth shut. That same day I met de Castañeda in the plaza. He and Soto had returned to the capitol from Los Angeles. The Mexican inquired punctiliously after the health of Letty and Courtenay.

“I learn with pleasure,” he added, in his own tongue, “that the *Heron* is due in Monterey Bay.”

“Yes,” said I curtly.

“You are changed, señor,” he continued blandly. “You look like a true caballero. How long do you remain in the city?”

“My plans are uncertain, señor.”

"Nothing is certain in this world."

"Except death," said I moodily, for I was linking his visit to Monterey with Letty's return.

"True," he answered, with a grim smile; "although some of us bear charmed lives." And he saluted and passed on.

Next day, the *Heron* came to her old moorings, and I went aboard at once. Courtenay said, with a cheerful grin, that he had made a mistake.

"I kept my plots from you, John. After all, the difference is small. You ran with the hare, I coursed with the hounds."

"A sorry pack, Courtenay—too fat and sleek for hunting."

"You take life seriously," he replied, laughing. "Your Alvarado is a surly fellow. Egad! the work *he* does gives *me* the backache."

Thus lightly he dismissed the subject. And if I condemn him now as frivolous and volatile, 'tis because I cannot see his laughing face, the twinkle in his blue eyes, the coaxing tones of his melodious voice. These had ever affected me, and I was so truly glad to welcome him, that I lacked moral courage to scold him. He took for granted that what was mine was his. And he added that he thirsted for pastoral joys, and seemed as sorry as I that the coming of Castellero was delayed. Jaynes turned over his ship to the mate. Courtenay and Letty lodged with Thomas Larkin; and Courtenay, having money to burn in company with Castro and de Castañeda, left his wife to be entertained by John Charity. What hours I could spare from my duties

I spent with her. Time had changed a girl into a woman, and if a sparkle or two had fled from her eyes, a dimple from her cheek, there glowed instead the light that warms as well as illumines. In my sight she was ten times as beautiful. Castañeda, I fancy, thought so too.

"Courtenay will grow jealous of me," I said one Sunday, as we sat together in the sand-dunes that fringe the bay. I had marked her willingness to be often in my company.

"He does not need me as he did," she answered constrainedly, her cheeks flushing. "He can amuse himself without—us."

She slipped in the "us" so slyly that I laughed. But my heart was sore. In the old Oxford days I had burned with jealousy because my friend made other friends so easily. So I could now sympathise with poor Letty.

"I wish he would leave Castañeda alone," I remarked gloomily.

She raised her brows, the innocent creature.

"You always speak so—so ungenerously of him," she murmured. "And 'tis not like you, dear John."

I was about to tell her of Cosmé Servin. Yet I could not bring myself to speak ill of my enemy. Moreover, since Castañeda had met Letty he seemed to have reformed, and amongst the Montereyenas there was much rejoicing over this tardy repentance. As for me, the ugly smear of a dissolute life was no plainer than the scar on his face. Such a man, to compass his ends, can play any part.

Meantime old Mark's courtship gave us many an

honest laugh. I had called with him upon Tia Maria Luisa the night of his arrival, hoping to tickle her favour with a peace-offering—a large box of *panocha*, a sweetmeat she preferred above all others. Mark placed in her plump hands a bottle of brandied cherries, and if she counted me a Trojan she did not scruple to accept my gift. I told her that Courtenay and I were about to become rancheros.

“I heard that you were busying yourself about such matters,” she replied politely. “I was not aware, however, that a foreigner and a heretic could acquire title. Have you found yourself a wife, señor?”

We had opened the bottle of cherries, but the good liqueur in which they were preserved had toughened (as alcohol will) rather than softened the stout dame’s heart. I answered softly that I knew where to look for a wife, whereat she chuckled in oleaginous fashion. I made certain that she was in possession of information of interest to me, but her moon face had no more expression than a new-laid egg.

“If you marry,” she spoke to me, but her beady eyes rested complacently upon old Mark, “you must join the only true Church.”

“Oh!” growled he, “I’ve no objections to turning Roman Catholic. Not a bit. But it would take a woman, not a priest, to convert me;” and so saying, he glanced very sweetly at Tia Maria.

“You love not the ladies, señor capitan,” said the lady coquettishly. “See, you are unmarried. *Que Lastima!*”

“I love ’em,” said Mark, “but they don’t love me.”

Tia Maria screamed with laughter. Old Mark looked

very comical, a typical sea-dog, but he was not displeased. The laughter was complimentary, ironical; that an English captain should lack ladies to love him was, according to Tia Maria, supremely ridiculous. If the old sea-dog's big black beard was streaked with white, what of it? Had he not burnt Nelson's powder at Trafalgar? And if his language, and maybe his clothes, smelt of tar, both were silvered with the salt of half-a-dozen oceans.

"This is no town for bachelors," said Courtenay. "The governor's wedding will breed others."

"I know of one other already," said Tia Maria, with a malicious glance at me. "Don Miguel Soto and my niece Magdalena are likely to become one."

"Soto!" exclaimed Courtenay, with his most scornful laugh. "What!"

Tia Maria shrugged her fat shoulders.

"It makes so little difference. Look you, I married a small ugly man. *Ojala!* but he was ill-favoured. Still he made me a good husband. I never saw him till my wedding-day. And then it was too late. He gave me lovely donas. This rebozo was one of them. You see he is dead, but the donas are still in that big chest yonder."

Courtenay told the dame that now she could marry to please herself.

"Magdalena," she continued, "disobeyed her father once. She won't do it again. *Madre de Dios!* what a little fool!"

The hot angry blood began to flow into my cheeks. I could not doubt that my dear had been punished, perhaps cruelly, for her disobedience. I could see in fancy

Estrada's stern face, and thought continually of that beautiful but lonely ranch near San Luis Obispo. You may be sure I wasted no righteous wrath upon Soto and his suit, for most of these Californian dames had the trick of fibbing. But I swore that some day, by God's grace, my love and devotion should make amends to Magdalena for the suffering she had endured.

Presently we took our leave of Tia Maria Luisa, leaving old Mark in her tender care. She squeezed my hand at parting. "*Ay yi*," she whispered, "I am sorry for you, my friend; but, *Virgen Santisima*! are there not many girls in Alta California? One piece of *panocha*, look you, is as good as another." She was nibbling at the sweetmeat with her small white teeth.

"El Capitan doesn't think so," I replied significantly, and the answer pleased her. Afterward I learned that from that hour she counted me a friend.

CHAPTER XVI.

RE-ENTER CUPID.

MEANTIME, the town was agog with excitement over a fashionable wedding and its attendant festivities—a bear and bull fight, horse-races, endless eating and drinking; in brief, a week's carnival. And upon the eve of the function, Alvarado told me that another plot was afoot, and that the "friends" of the Señor Valence—as he put it—were implicated, to wit, Soto and de Castañeda. I offered myself as surety for Courtenay's innocence.

"*Tate*," said Alvarado; "he is fool, not knave, this

pleasure-loving youth, but fools at times give wise men anxiety. Estrada is here."

A question burned on my tongue's tip, and my chief laughed.

"Yes," said he, "Magdalena is with him."

Then he eyed me curiously and waited.

"If the pack were reshuffled," he observed presently, "Soto might find himself next to your Queen of Hearts. Are you still of the same mind in regard to her?"

"Yes, I am. Your Excellency smiles; but I love her, as—well, as she deserves to be loved."

"And," he seemed cruelly unsympathetic, "and you are sure, my friend, that this love is returned?"

"Absolutely."

"*Bueno*. I see my way. If I told you to go to Estrada to-morrow and to ask him for his daughter, if I authorised you to use my name as a guarantee that your fortune would be my care, if, in fine, I sent him a son-in-law, I, Alvarado, do you think he would accept you?"

"Your Excellency," I exclaimed, fervently grateful, "how can I thank you?"

"Thank me later," he said drily. "If my suspicions hold water, you will be politely shown the door. And—*Dios!* I hate to wound you—but I doubt whether the señorita will accord you the reception you anticipate. She will be at the Casa Estrada to-night. Go and tempt Fortune."

"Your Excellency is not quite frank with me."

"You are—dense, my friend," he retorted. "Well, then, listen. Estrada has come to Monterey, a town he detests, to attend, ostensibly, this wedding, but unless

my information is at fault he and Castañeda are about to make a last effort."

"Then you apprehend assassination?"

"I expect to take care of myself and of you—hot head."

"And you think that Magdalena would lend herself to——"

"I did not say so," he interrupted; "but my point is this—a fine one, you will admit—if Estrada considers your suit, we may assume that he considers the issue of his plans at best doubtful, but if he is confident of success he will politely, very politely, snap his fingers at both of us. I know the man well."

"And I know the maid."

"Her father's daughter, Juan."

"Her mother's, your Excellency."

"Well, I wish you luck. I shall not require your services again to-day."

As I was hurrying to Larkin's I met old Mark and told him my news. He said that he had just seen Magdalena; and, when I asked him how she did, he replied that she was thin and peaky-faced. "The bird is pining," he added, somewhat gloomily. I asked how his own affairs were prospering. He grinned and said gruffly: "The aunt is making a damned fool of me."

"Jilted?" I gasped.

"No, my lad; we'll be spliced right and tight before Christmas; but I am to do penance. A Jack priest orders me about as if I were a swab before the mast. Enough o' that. And, hark ye, the Madam is your friend. I've given you a coat of paint, and regis-

tered you *AI*. But you, too, must turn Papist. She insists. What? You won't. Pooh, pooh, the maid is worth it."

He pinched my arm. Then he dealt me a slap in the face.

"Jack," said he, "I must warn you that your Magdalena has a big black crow to pick with you."

I stared at him, gaping with amazement.

"In God's name, what have I done?"

"My lad, she's a Latin and but a slip of a girl. She has suffered. And I'll wager she counted upon you to come to the rescue."

"I am working night and day for her sake."

"Tut, tut! Here, Jack, love comes first; work is put off till to-morrow. Judge not the maid according to your prim Oxford standard."

And with that he left me, face to face, for the first time, with the barrier that lies for ever between the sexes.

Magdalena, it seemed, resented what she stigmatised as neglect. Neglect! Good God! After such strenuous endeavour! I forgot that while I was working she was sitting idle, a captive, scorned by her father, possibly ill-treated. The injustice of woman is a scourge of scorpions. I had yet to learn that the best of them visit upon the heads of their well-beloved the sins and shortcomings of others. Now I was being whipped for the cruelty of Don Narciso, and you may be sure I smarted. Letty poured oil into my wounds; predicted plenary absolution for sins not committed. Her sympathy, I discovered, was with the maid and against the man. I ought at least to have written.

"The letter would have fallen into her father's hands."

"Not if it had been given to a friend to deliver. There are ways and means."

When my wrath cooled I saw more clearly the nature of my offence. Then I burned again to kiss away the hurt, and so burning returned to Letty and coaxed her to walk with me to the Casa Estrada. I prinked myself out in the suit Vallejo had given me, and scrubbed my big face till it shone like a harvest moon. Finally, feeling as stiff as the felt of my sombrero, I climbed the hill with Letty, and presently stood, scarlet with heat and excitement, in the presence of my mistress.

She welcomed me with cruel ceremony. 'Tis true Tia Maria Luisa was present, but Letty—who received but a cold kiss from Magdalena—engaged the stout dame. I was confounded at the change in her: her face was pale, her eyes encircled with bistre-coloured rings, her graceful figure less round in outline. The eyes, however, flashed a spark or two.

"I compliment you," she began, in her soft voice. "The rich grasses of Monterey agree with Don Juan Charity. *Ay de mi!* the feed is not so fine on the Santa Margarita."

I suppose I looked like a stuffed calf. None the less, though compared indirectly to the beasts of the field, I was not dumb. The prick of the goad moved me to retort:

"If my body has been fed in Monterey, my spirit—God knows—has nourished itself on the Santa Margarita."

"You have not forgotten how to turn a phrase," said my Lady Disdain, and she met all advances and explanations with a pretty show of wit and exasperating indifference. She was equally cold with Letty. I had not the sense to guess what ailed her.

Presently Letty rose, and we took our leave. I was in a vile temper, yet with a queer twist in my vitals, for suffering and solitude were writ plain on Magdalena's face. I had appraised working at a higher price than waiting—a man's blunder. Now I felt doubly sore on her account and on my own. Passing Soto with a grin upon his face, I was minded to pull his long nose, but reflected suddenly that I would then be doing to him what I had accused Magdalena of doing to me. After all the barrier between a man and a maid is not so big as it seems. I took pleasure in stripping myself of my finery, and made certain that Magdalena had been better pleased with my soiled face and clothes. I must have looked a popinjay to her. After that I played a game of skittles with Larkin, and listened to the gossip of the town, but all the time I was thinking of the grating in Magdalena's chamber and savouring the honey of stolen kisses.

Presently Courtenay joined us with a cloud on his fair face. I explained matters, and he whistled, much disconcerted. He had counted upon Magdalena's becoming my wife and the companion of Lettice. He fretted at the touch of the curb. The mercury in him raced up and down at any change in the temperature.

"Soto thinks his marriage a certainty," he muttered. "And if she jilts you——"

"Don't use that word."

"You were plighted lovers."

"Were? We *are*."

'Twas late when I stole up to Magdalena's grating, and, lo! in the middle of the road stood Soto, guitar in hand, wailing out in a dismal falsetto some absurd serenade. I slipped away noiselessly, making good use of the gulch before mentioned, and turning a sharp corner tumbled over Procopio. He held his finger to his lips and then grinned. I understood that Servin was also abroad, and that my faithful servant had a cross-marked bullet ready for its billet. We crouched there for half-an-hour till the coast was clear, for Cosmé joined Soto after the squalling was done, and the pair strolled townward together, a well-matched team. I bade Procopio keep his distance, and then ran to the grating. No light burned in the room, but I whispered "Magdalena" through the bars, and waited. She was there. I could hear her breathing.

"Cruel one," I whispered. "I have my puñal at my belt. Come and finish your work."

Was the wretch laughing? A soft chuckle fell on the silence.

"Magdalena, your laughter is a stab in the dark."

A sigh inflamed me.

"Come," I urged passionately, "you cannot doubt my love. You have it all. Will you make no return? Will you leave me bankrupt? You have misjudged me, wronged me, but I love you too dearly to be angry. *Dios de mi alma!* will you keep me in hell, when you hold the keys of Heaven?"

I heard a movement toward the grating; then the fat

voice of Tia Maria Luisa said, softly, "Don Juan, will you teach the captain the art of making love? Truly you are a master," and she chuckled again, but not unkindly.

"Dear lady," I urged, "where is Magdalena? Send her to me."

"*Ojala!* You ask me, her dueña, for my niece, as if she were a dish of *dulces*."

"You know what love is," I pleaded. "Be kind."

"I am kind not to wake Don Narciso."

"You are the most blessed of women, and El Capitan the luckiest of men."

"*Ay yi!* how sweetly you talk! You make me feel young."

"Is Magdalena very angry with me?"

"Never mind. The Señor Soto sings to her."

"His singing does not stir my jealousy, dear lady. Will you take a message from me to Magdalena?"

"What is it?" I could tell from the tone that curiosity was pricking duty.

"Swear to deliver it?"

"I swear, by the Virgin, if—if it is proper."

"Your ear, please."

She inclined her ear between the iron bars. 'Twas the prettiest part of her, a pink, delicately curved ear, that had leaned to more than one such message as I straightway delivered.

"*Ay de mi!* You wicked man! How dare you!"

"Please take that to Magdalena, señora."

"To the captain rather; he will kill you. *Dios!* but you are bold, bad! What will Padre Quijas say when I tell him in confession that a heretic has kissed me?"

"Tell every man in Monterey, señora. Not one will blame me."

And with that for a parting shot, I marched away.

However, the next morning, when I waited on Don Narciso, and stated the nature of my business with him, he said, with a face like a block of granite, that his daughter was not for me.

"For Soto?" I exploded.

"Not for you, señor."

"I love her and she loves me," I stormed. "You dare not keep us apart. She is mine—here and hereafter."

"*Tate, tate!* Has youth in England no respect and courtesy for age. Yes, señor don Inglese, I dare to keep my daughter from a heretic in this world, and God will doubtless attend to the matter in the next. I wish you good-day."

CHAPTER XVII.

FOR LOVE I BECOME NOT A PAPIST BUT A JEW.

THE cannibals' reason for the eating of missionaries—because they are so good—does not adequately account for woman's appetite for the company of priests. Padre José Lorenzo Quijas, for instance, was not good (not even from a cannibals' point of view, being tough as the *hondo* of a *reata*), yet he was the pet confessor of half the dames in Monterey. He had, however, a tender sympathy for sinners, pretty ones in particular, and with him, as with the fair penitents, precept ever outstripped performance.

Knowing his influence with Tia Maria Luisa, knowing also that the stout dame had warmed to me, I hurried to the friar after my interview with the Don, and gave him the marrow of the matter in half-a-dozen sentences, thereby glutting his humour.

“Tut, tut!” he chuckled, tapping my cheek with his broad forefinger. “Is thine a holiday title to the name of lover? Kites, my son, rise against the wind. A maid’s caprice may be the zephyr that blows a heretic to Heaven. Now, thou must join the Church. Then I’ll tackle the man, and the maid, and the widow, and marry thee myself within the month. What? Oh, thou mule! Well, thou must burn here and hereafter. And speaking of burning, my mouth is a fiery furnace this morning. Let us find the pious Jaynes and crack a bottle.”

“You won’t help me?”

“My son, ask not too much of a Zacatecan. See now, I cannot help thee, but I will not hurt thee; and thou shalt have my prayers.”

Whereat I laughed and left him to his prayers—and his bottle.

Alvarado cocked an anxious eye when I reported the result of my interview with Estrada.

“The old fox must be sure of his grapes,” he murmured. Then I told him that thanks to my Yaqui’s vigilance I had probably escaped a thrust of the puñal. He frowned heavily and bade me run no risks.

Of course I could think of nothing but Magdalena. And one must live in a Spanish country to understand how thoroughly my dear was encompassed with bristling abattis. She was not permitted to stir from the Casa

Estrada unescorted; and at the wedding—a function she was bound to attend—she was hemmed in by her father and his black-a-vised friends.

Soto, in a gorgeous new suit, waited on her, and Dame Gossip's tongue wagged faster than a terrier's tail. The fellow, I must confess, could ride like a centaur, and performed a most extraordinary feat. I saw him take a silver salver laden with glasses filled to the brim with champagne; then he spurred his horse to a full gallop, pulled the beast on to its haunches before it had gone fifty yards, and served the wine to us. Not a drop had been spilled!

From all parts of the country came the queer ox-drawn carts, rumbling along upon their huge solid wheels. The women sat inside—those at least who could not ride—and in front rode the men, a glittering cavalcade, a-sparkle with silk, velvet, and embroidery, singing, for the most part, the songs of the country. Here is one:

*“ Palomita, vete al Campo,
Y dile a los tiradores
Que no te tiren, porq'eres
La duena de mis amores.”*

This touched me to the core. Would these hunters slay my own little dove, who held my love in her tender breast? They had failed as yet to kill me; but Quijas, when he was sober and in serious mood, assured me that a father would not scruple to severely punish a disobedient child.

Not till the day of the bull and bear fight did I get word to her. It happened on this wise: The crowd

would have been less cheery lacking the Jew, Solomon. I saw him each day displaying his wares upon the plaza, cajoling his customers, ogling the girls, and, need it be added, coining money. He came to me at my lodging and asked eagerly how I fared, but I was busy at the time and begged him to call again. After that he was busy, so nothing but nods passed between us. At the bull ring I marked him perched upon a corner of the high fence, and pointed him out to Letty, telling her of the famous trade he drove and predicting for him a golden future. I added that after the day's work in the plaza he would shoulder his pack and tramp from house to house, skimming the evening's cream at each. Letty pricked up her sharp little ears. "Let him play the postman," she said, "between Magdalena and you." I was amazed that so simple a reading of the riddle had eluded a fond and scheming lover. Certainly, I would write that same day. But, on second thoughts, a better plan tickled my fancy. Why should I not masquerade in the gloaming as Solomon? We were something of a size. With his peculiar clothes, his pack, some false hair, and a pot of rouge I would wager that the change could be made. As soon as the fight was over (a sorry combat, for the bear was tied by one leg to a stake, and the bull was too tame), I sought Solomon, and told him to be at my lodging without fail at seven. He made a grimace, but I jingled some loose silver, and he winked approval and assent.

But when, after supper, I unfolded my plan, the Jew raised his hands and voice in terrified protest. He was plainly scared out of his wits, and promised me that Estrada would spit him like a pullet if the fraud were

detected. Finally cash-box arguments prevailed, and we exchanged clothes. I added to my nose size and colour, stuffed my waistcoat with a pillow, trailed a brace of wiry curls behind my ears, and gave my eyebrows an upward tilt. When I spoke to Solomon in his own voice and peculiar accent, the wrinkles fled from his forehead. He pronounced the metamorphosis nearly perfect—in the twilight.

Then I shouldered his heavy pack and sallied forth. The street was empty, for the town was making merry near the plaza, but as I turned the corner past Alvarado's house who should rudely jostle the humble Jew but the Señor Cosmé Servin, a bully, and, as events proved, a coward. Poor Solomon was patient as an ass beneath the insults and injuries of the Californians, entering them, doubtless, with other debts in his ledger; but I was minded to astonish the mestizo, so I fetched him with my left fist a buffet that laid him flat in the dust. He jumped up quickly, puñal in hand, but with Solomon's cudgel I cracked the bone of his wrist so sharply that he dropped his knife and scuttled away howling. I grinned and stepped briskly on. Close to the barracks some booths had been put up, and in a willow enclosure a fandango was in full swing. Passing the gate, I saw that mad priest Quijas, who had laid aside his Zacatecan habit, and now was footing it with a pretty Indita. He had arrayed himself in the *cuera de gamuza* of a soldier, and looked a swashbuckler of the church militant. As ill-luck would have it, he espied me, and yelling out, "Halt! Jew," dropped his pretty armful and gave chase, for I scurried away like a rabbit at sound of his stentor tones. I stopped,

however, out of earshot of the crowd, and was condemned by the friar to eternal punishment for the pace I had set.

"A rebozo," he panted, pinching my arm. "Quick—undo thy pack."

I began to unstrap it, mumbling apologies. It was dark, and the good priest was more than mellow, but delay and a crowd were likely to undo me.

"Father," I muttered in Spanish, "keep off the buzzards, and I will give thee my wares at cost, nay, I'll make thee a present of a rebozo, for truly trouble awaits me if I be not at the house of Estrada upon the stroke of eight."

The friar eyed me sharply; then he laughed, and growled in his beard that the Jew's voice was thickened with aguardiente. As I pushed the rebozo across the pack, he caught my hand in his and gripped his thanks for the present. He was a powerful man and gripped hard; unconsciously I gripped back. "*Dios!*" he exclaimed. "Thou hast a Christian's grip, Solomon. I like thee the better for it. Go in peace."

"Father," I mumbled, "I have given thee the rebozo for nothing save a squeezed hand. May your Indita prove more grateful."

"Thou impudent knave!" he said hurriedly. "See now, I frolic with the crowd; they like it, but I do not soil my cloth. None of the *gente de razon*" (the quality) "is here. Not a word, Solomon, thou wise Jew, to the ladies at Estrada's. Be gone!"

I was right glad to be released, for some half-breeds were hovering round us, not daring to approach the sacred person of the priest, yet curious as to the nature

of his business with a Jew. You may be sure I started hot-foot up the hill, and I heard Quijas bidding the others not to follow me.

Now the Jew had told me that Tia Maria Luisa had ordered of him some linen kerchiefs, plain goods to be fashioned into filmy laces by the cunning hands of the serving-women, and these lay snug at the bottom of the pack against some fine white silk stockings—my lure for Magdalena. Above them were the tawdry trifles so dear to the heart of Inditas. Like a canny housewife, I proposed to scatter my common grain for the chickens to peck at, whilst my tit-bits would challenge the attention of that fatted hen, Tia Maria Luisa. On arrival at the house I was surrounded at once by the chattering crowd of domestics, and presently Tia Maria waddled forth and drew me aside. I gave her the linen, which she examined with a falcon's eye, and then, in a humble voice, I craved permission to show a pair of stockings to the señorita. I had promised them to her, I said, and of course she would wish to see them. Tia Maria grunted, and a girl was sent a-running for my dear. How my heart ached, as she walked towards me, so thin, so pale, so tired. But her voice was warm and kind when she greeted the poor Jew, and she begged me to enter the sala where she could inspect my wares in peace and silence. This piece of luck I had scarce hoped for, though Solomon had told me that such was her custom. Alas! as I crossed the threshold I spied the sour face of Don Narciso peering out of a cloud of tobacco smoke, and cheek by jowl with the Don sat Soto, leering at a glass of Madeira. Truly I was in the jackals' den. How-

ever, I passed them in safety, and my dear led the way to a table at the end of the room. As I bent over my pack I murmured: "'Tis I, Magdalena, your lover."

She started; and then her sweet face was suffused with the tenderest glow, and a sigh fluttered from her parted lips. I had stormed the citadel, surprised the garrison, and could dictate my terms—unconditional surrender. Action stampeded the imps bred by inaction. I saw that I was forgiven.

As she bent, blushing, over my pack, I stole a kiss. Then, as I mumbled a pedlar's patter, I exhausted a lover's vocabulary in pleading my cause.

She began to bargain for the stockings, while her eyes showered sparks upon a heart sensitive as tinder.

"They are too dear," she said loudly; whispering "as thou art, *querido*."

"Pure silk," I retorted, in my execrable Jew's Spanish; "made for a goddess—whom I worship," I added softly.

The game warmed us both, and the men at the other end of the room had their backs to us, and were completely engrossed with their cigars and wine.

"Why wert thou so cruel, Magdalena?"

"Answer me truly, Juan. Didst thou not once love thy beautiful cousin?"

And at that I made tardy confession, whereat she pouted, and confided in turn that she had been and still was jealous of Letty. The minutes flew, and we feared to arouse the suspicions of Don Narciso, so presently Magdalena said aloud, with mocking emphasis, "Art sure, Solomon, that thy goods will wear?"

"For a lifetime, señorita."

"Thou canst come again, Solomon. *Adios*, Loch-invar."

"At your service, señorita. *Adios*, Elena."

Then we glanced furtively round and our lips met. A slight grunt from the doorway tore us apart. There, on the threshold, palsied with amazement, stood Tia Maria Luisa. Not a moment was to be lost. I rose to my full height, lifted my false curls, and blew a kiss to the stout dame. Magdalena flew to her, chattering like a frightened finch. I rammed my wares into my pack, and shuffled past the men, past the women, and out into the patio. Tia Maria followed majestically, a battle-ship sailing into action.

"Wretch!" she growled. "How dare you, how dare you?"

"Señora, I kiss your lovely ear, that is—if I only could."

"You are utterly shameless. I must tell my brother."

"Then El Capitan will die a bachelor."

"Go, go, or I shall strike you. Take these."

She held the handkerchiefs in her hand. "Keep them," I whispered.

"Ay! You are a devil." Cupidity wrestled with duty and prevailed.

"*Adios*, señora."

She turned a broad back to me, as I slipped across the patio and mingled with the crowd. Five minutes later I was running, helter-skelter, down the slope, and within a quarter of an hour Solomon had his pack again and a small sackful of pesetas. He chuckled with delight when he learned of Cosmé Servin's mis-

adventure, and groaned when I imitated Tia Maria Luisa's peculiar grunt and baleful stare.

"My cracious!" he exclaimed. "I dink I do no more peesness mit her."

"Cheer up. El Capitan will soon foot the bills at the Casa Estrada."

Solomon shook his greasy curls.

"El Capitan vill be fooled," he said solemnly, "if he ogspect to touch der moneys of dot lady. He vill be fooled badly, by Chimini."

And in this Solomon, the Jew, proved a true prophet.

Now Magdalena's allusion to *Lochinvar* set me thinking. The *Heron* was about to clear for England, and I made no doubt that the mate, now skipper, a warm friend of mine, would gladly splice Magdalena and me, sailor fashion, upon the high seas. Then he could put us ashore at Santa Barbara. Later, Holy Church, who ever accepts the inevitable with grace and sagacity, would not refuse her rites to a daughter of the Estradas, and all Californians would agree that John Charity had proved himself a lover and a caballero.

Accordingly, I wrote a letter, first in Spanish, which I destroyed, for the Spanish tongue, albeit the language of love, does not readily lend itself to the plainer, more practical purposes of life. So I cut my quill to a blunter point and began again in English, which Magdalena could read fluently, though ever unwilling to talk it. I avoided, it will be noted, the use of names.

"MY DEAREST" (I began), "would to God that you could read my heart as easily as this letter, for then I

know that you would not fear to trust yourself to my keeping. I know what your life has been for many months, that he who should protect and love you has proved cruel, a tyrant, a gaoler. I know how lonely you are, how forlorn, and I know, also, that of late I have unconsciously given you offence, because I have been *forced*—I underscore the word—to console another woman, as forlorn as you, a woman, sweetheart, for whom I have no such love as I bear you, but whose beauty, as I told you, once stirred my heart, and whose present unhappiness stirs my sympathy and pity. The poor soul is racked by jealousy, and you will understand without further words the delicacy of my position. But now your love claims me, as I claim you. And I ask you for both our sakes to brave the chatter of the gossips, the sneer of those unworthy to kiss your feet, and to give your life as you have given your love into my charge. I ask you to leave Monterey with me. And I have a plan. The skipper of the *Heron* is my friend. His gig lies beside the Custom House barge. Your quick wit will devise means to such an end as our mutual happiness. And once on blue water we can laugh at the world. The skipper will put us ashore at Santa Barbara. My darling, there is no other way than this. 'Tis an awful step for a woman to take. Only true love can excuse it. Come to me, sweetheart, come. I cannot live without you.

“To-morrow I shall look for a red rose in your hair, for that will mean assent to my plan. If it is not there, I shall know that—No, no, it will be there. I no more doubt your love for me than mine for you.

Hasta luego,

Your devoted friend.”

Now, the matter of composing this billet had been simple enough, but the manner of delivering it troubled me. While I was debating the how and the when of it, Courtenay came into my room and sat down.

"I am honoured," said I, for he seemed to prefer the company of Castañeda and Castro to mine, a fact that vexed and hurt me. Yet I confess that his *bon-homie* and charm were ever potent to melt resentment. Accordingly, we fell to talking, and I told him of my adventure, of my dear maid's surrender, and finally of the letter I had just sealed. I added that I was certain none but Quijas would know of what had passed between Magdalena and me, for the holy man would commend Tia Maria Luisa to silence. Had not the Jew caught the Gentile on the hip? For pranks that might not soil a habit carefully laid aside, would, if repeated to dames of quality, discolour a friar's reputation.

"I will get your billet delivered," said Courtenay suddenly. "Give it to me, old John."

I let him have it—fool that I was—with a word of caution, nothing more. He would not tell me the name of his postman, but was laughingly positive that the letter would be duly delivered. Later, he informed me that a dame of his acquaintance had undertaken the task, and that it would surely be accomplished.

I must now pause to observe that I blame myself as much as Courtenay for a thoughtless and reckless piece of business. Knowing my foster-brother to be somewhat hare-brained, I was a fool to trust him with a paper so important. His gay importunity

beguiled my judgment, as before it had beguiled it many a time when we were boys and undergraduates. What became of it must now be set forth, although I learned the exact facts many months after. It seems that Courtenay had been struck by the charms of a Montereyna, the wife of a big, yellow-faced, black-whiskered kinsman of Alvarado. And she returned his admiration with interest, being naturally flirtatious, and—as I shall shortly prove—none too scrupulous. Courtenay has since sworn that 'twas play on his part, but the dame doubtless thought otherwise. In fine, she was infatuated with the young man's splendid figure and handsome face. To this lady Courtenay delivered my letter. She was an intimate friend and kinswoman of Magdalena, and, being a Latin, accepted the commission without asking indiscreet questions. A man of sense would at least have made plain that the letter was none of his, and had Courtenay frankly told her so, much terrible misery would have been avoided. When he took his leave the lady, believing that my foster-brother had written the billet himself, broke the seal, and not being able to interpret the English, knowing also that Magdalena could read it easily, her suspicions became certainty. In this mood she encountered de Castañeda, who lodged in the same house, and to him she made confession and entreated a translation. Now Castañeda knew my handwriting, and might have consoled the lady, but some hearts being as easily broken (and mended) as seals, and a knave ever having an immeasurable advantage over a fool, he deliberately assured her that the billet was indeed Courtenay's, and so inflamed her jealousy

that she finally gave it to the Mexican. Indeed, he demanded it, as the price of silence, telling the dame—I had this story from her own lips some years after—that he had a use for it.

And thus it came to pass that my own foster-brother, *mon frère du lait*, as the French have it, put into the hands of my enemy a deadly weapon.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A TIGER-LILY.

NEXT day my eyes were peeled for a sight of the red rose. I knew that I should see Magdalena at the threshing of her aunt's grain, an occasion, of course, for merry-making. The dame owned many acres around Monterey, which, with the adobe house, formed a portion of her late husband's estate. Everybody rides in California, but as the corral wherein the grain was threshed was less than two miles from our lodging, I asked Courtenay to go afoot. He declined, pleading an engagement. Letty was present.

"We don't amuse him, Jack," she said softly; yet her blue eyes were flashing scorn and jealousy, and her lips were compressed as if she feared that her anger might leak from them. Courtenay left the room. I held my peace.

But, later, as Letty and I were climbing the second hill on the road to the threshing, my cousin began abruptly: "Dear John, I am miserable."

"Good Lord!" I exclaimed. "Let us sit down, and then you can tell me all about it."

"No, no," she murmured; "words won't mend the matter." None the less she sat down under a big live

oak and poured out her troubles. As she talked her pretty face began to pucker, and long before she had finished tears were trickling down her cheeks. I took her hand and held it tight. We had often sat thus as children, and it seemed hard to believe that we were thousands of miles from Cranberry-Orcas, and further still from that happy childhood.

"He has tired of me, John. He took me from your mother and father, and—'tis cruel, cruel!"

I would have paid a round sum had I been able to swear that she had no cause for tears. For Courtenay's love seemed indeed to have flitted from her. On this account my own heart had been sore. I had ever feared that the match between Sir Marmaduke's son and a country lass would prove a misfit. And yet, noting how cleverly she adapted herself to him, how vastly she had improved in wit and manners, and also in beauty, knowing, too, that love is the alchemist who can transmute even the base metal of passion into sterling affection, I had hoped also against my fears. What was evil in my foster-brother had begun to bloom and blossom in this lovely land. He was far from those influences and traditions that are as a buckler to many a home-keeping Briton. And he had never learned to say no. All this and more filtered through my mind.

For the moment I hated the Epicurean who had torn a primrose from a hedgerow and left it to wilt beneath a scorching sun; but when I began to abuse him (and I did not measure adjectives) the wife clapped her hand to my mouth, and sobbed harder than ever.

Well, what could I do then, in the name of the

Sphinx, but take this trembling creature into my arms and kiss away her tears? Truly a man's arms are a very present help in trouble to a weak woman. And she, poor dear soul, laid her wet face on my shoulder and hugged me tight. And then, as the devil would have it, who should come riding by but Estrada, Soto, and Magdalena. The dust lay thick as a Persian carpet on the road, and their horses were unshod.

Before I could release Letty the trio had passed. The old Don showed his breeding; not a smile twisted his grim lips. Soto chuckled and twisted his blue-black moustachios. Magdalena flaunted a scornful, fine-lady contempt, very maddening to see. Then she struck her horse and galloped on, as if anxious to place what distance she could between a false lover and his lady.

Letty, covered with confusion, entreated me to return to Monterey, but my pride forbade this, so we took the road again very soberly.

"I shall tell her the truth," said my cousin, whose tears were now dry. "I can make it right between you."

"Letty," said I, "the rose was not in her hair."

"I certainly did not see it, my poor John."

"She is of a jealous disposition," I muttered, and my tone was so mournful that Letty laughed for the first time that day.

"We all are," she retorted, "when—we really love. You have her heart, Jack. Don't fret."

Presently we reached the corral and found a couple of raised seats. The manner of threshing grain in Alta California was like this: Into a corral, built for the purpose around smooth hard ground, and filled with wheat in the shock, is driven a manada of mares; and

then a vaquero, cracking his cuerda, drives the mares round and round the enclosure till at length the grain is trampled out of the straw. To one accustomed to old-country methods this primitive function is not without charm.

Magdalena and Soto were opposite, and I could hear my dear laughing and talking in a voice louder than usual. Soto was grinning and grimacing like an ape; and the fellow looked so well outside his big bay gelding (the Californians and Mexicans never ride mares), and the handsome beast pranced and curvetted in such perfect accord with its rider, that I felt the fiercest pangs of jealousy. The old Don was riding slowly round, and when he passed me I caught his cold eye. He cut me dead. My rage at this insult was suddenly cooled by a misadventure that befell an urchin perched on the top rail of the corral. We had marked the little dare-devil already. He was throwing pellets of clay at the smoking backs of the mares, and now and again would swing down (hanging by bare legs to the bar) and try to slap the vaquero as he raced by. A more audacious attempt to knock off the vaquero's sombrero had caused him to lose his balance, and a second later a shout from the crowd proclaimed a fall. We could see him sprawling in the straw, half stunned and scared out of his wits. The mares had just passed, but if they completed another circuit their sharp hoofs would surely make mincemeat of the lad. I caught a shriek of horror from Magdalena, and then I saw Soto's bay breasting the barrier. It was a fine leap, finely taken, for jumping fences is not a sport practised by Californians. The horse topped the bar, and landed with a stagger,

but Soto steadied him cleverly, and sent him at a gallop across the corral. What followed was a pretty piece of work. As the leading mare was within twenty feet of the child, Soto swung out from the saddle, grasped the urchin by his shirt (he had little else in the way of clothing), and lifted him from the ground. At the pace he had set 'twas an amazing feat, for the bay turned sharp at the rails, and as he turned the Mexican swooped for the boy. Then holding his prize across the saddle, Soto thundered on ahead of the mares amidst the wild yells of the spectators. A minute later he rode out of the corral to receive the smiles and congratulations of Magdalena.

Quijas touched my arm.

"Ho, ho!" he said slyly. "Take care, my son, take care. That sort of thing drives our maidens crazy. See, she was pale as a snowdrop yesterday; to-day her cheeks are as warm as thine. So thou didst play the Jew last night. Fooled the father and the padre. *Ojala!* Did it avail thee? Thou hast a sour look. Soberly, my son, and speaking in thy true interest, thou dost ask too much. What! 'tis a cry for the moon."

I plucked up spirit to answer him, but his jests bit like acid.

"The baby who cries not, father, never gets the milk."

"*Bueno!* I forgive thee the pranks of last night. Thou didst embrace opportunity, but——"

"So did you, father," I whispered. "And what did she say when you gave her the rebozo?"

"My son, that does not concern thee. She mocked not a friend. See now—thou must look elsewhere for a wife. *Hasta luego.*"

He pushed on through the crowd, a friar again, robed in piety, of whom all foot passengers craved a benediction. I wondered what Tia Maria had said to him. The stout dame was no longer my enemy, but she dared not offend her brother, not even to please Jaynes. For that matter, the ancient mariner, whose voice I had often heard above the raging of a tempest, sat mute in the presence of the widow. She rated him unmercifully if the smell of rum was upon him, and he spoke of her to me, privately, as "the skipper." Yet he had come to a safe anchorage in Pactolian sands, and the dame in melting mood was sweet as *panocha*.

And now, how to make my peace with Magdalena racked my brains. I despatched another letter to her by the hand of Solomon. 'Twas returned unopened.

During the days that followed, Letty—to my intense annoyance—received marked attentions from de Castañeda. Why she tolerated him is a question that has been asked and not yet answered; instinct should have warned her that here was a hooded snake poised for a deadly stroke. He had, of course, the guile as well as the venom of the cobra. And hence the woes that befell us. The best of women is a creature of ambuscades, of surprises and disguises. Letty had always seemed to me a simple soul, transparent as crystal, white as a moon-flower. But now, forsaken by her husband, homesick, and lovesick, she assumed the motley of folly and caprice, the bilious yellows of jealousy, the scarlet of anger, pigments hourly mixed and stirred by her handsome lord. He, for his part, loving peace and mirth, held aloof. He had worked—so he said—for many months, and his

holiday fell upon feast days when licence stalked unrebuked even in friar's robes. Can you wonder that poor little Letty deemed herself the unhappiest wife in Christendom?

I ought to have scolded her, but I had not the heart.

Magdalena I had not seen since the threshing, save at a distance, but I learned from Courtenay that Soto was in constant attendance, and when I passed him in the street he wore the simper of an accepted lover.

"The truth is this," said Courtenay, to whom, by the way, I had not confided the facts, "women, old John, are kittle cattle. Magdalena has tired of you, even as Letty has tired of me."

At this amazing statement I laughed bitterly.

"Look at the way she is treating me. She imposes the burden of sour looks and cutting words, yet when I try to explain she turns aside an adder's ear. Damme, 'tis taxation without representation."

I really believe that he counted himself an injured person. Yet I was too angry to look at the thing in its humorous light.

"My sympathy, Courtenay, is with Letty."

"Good God!" he exclaimed, "you look at me as if I had ridden rough-shod through the Decalogue."

"You may have broken no laws. You are like to break the sweetest, truest heart in the world."

He was certainly affected, but after his fashion tried to laugh the matter off.

"You exaggerate, old John. Would she have me for ever dangling at her apron-strings?"

"Ay, she would, for she loves you; and you ought to be philosopher enough to know that you can only take

from the bunghole of life's barrel what you pour in at the spigot. Letty is no fine city madam, but a country lass."

"She has the looks and spirit of a countess."

"The spirit, Courtenay, is a pale ghost, believe me."

He raised his handsome brows and left me. I was sorry for myself, for his selfishness had seemingly undone me, and desperately sorry for Letty, the little lass I had pelted not long ago with cowslip balls and hung with daisy chains. This was her dark hour, and the farthing dip called advice only emphasised the gloom.

"He makes merry, and so shall I," she said.

"Don't trifle with happiness, Letty."

"Has it not trifled with me?" she asked sharply. "I find that my hero is a—butterfly."

Time, as a rule, may be trusted to mend hearts, and I was too busy just then with my own troubles to pay much heed to the bickerings of others. Faithful to her promise, Letty demanded an interview with Magdalena, from which she returned with flashing eyes and scarlet cheeks. "I congratulate you, John," she said sharply. "You have had a narrow escape." And not another word would she vouchsafe me.

Meantime, we were watching, watching, watching for the white wings of Castillero's barque. I often wondered in these days whether ambition's game is worth the candle. Uncertainty fills many a coffin, and no man's nerves are proof against the impending thrust of a puñal. Doubtless the lovely Martina Castro shed many tears, and fingered impatiently her bridal finery. But my chief continued as cool and impassive as a block of ice.

"You look unhappy," he said to me one morning in November, "and your cheek is growing thin and pale. *Dios!* Wipe these worries from your face, my poor boy. Fools can afford to fret, wise men must smile. You have the air of one who has had the doors of Paradise slammed in his teeth."

"And that," said I gloomily, "is exactly what has happened to me."

Inaction, too, bred blue devils. Pending the arrival of the *comisionado* the business of state lay somewhat in abeyance. Nor could I doubt that the plans of our enemies, cleverly hid from us, were nearly ripe for execution. I guessed as much from *de Castañeda's* extreme civility to me. Treachery sits at ease on some faces. The Mexicans were bland and smiling; the old Don, on the contrary, was puckered with frowns.

"You are sure that your handsome friend is only with these fellows and not of them?" said Alvarado. "*Bueno*, let us test him. I appreciate the apothegm: 'Deceive me once, it is your fault; deceive me twice it is mine.' If he is caught in their mesh, he will refuse to leave Monterey, will he not?" I admitted as much, and he continued: "I think a change would do you good, Juan. Go into the Carmelo foothills for a week, my friend, and take Valence with you. If he refuses to accompany you, I shall draw my own conclusions."

"But, your Excellency, I cannot leave you—now."

"You will do as I tell you," he replied coldly.

"And the Señora Valence?" I urged, for I was sore at leaving my patron. Yet he had the habit of command, and I was his servant.

“Take her with you,” he said curtly.

Accordingly, I asked Courtenay if he were not keen to kill a fat buck, and, somewhat to my relief, he approved what he called an outing. He mentioned, for the thousandth time, his work aboard the *Heron*; and when I told him that he deserved a holiday, gravely agreed with me. Thus it will be seen that a selfish, pleasure-seeking life may play the deuce with that gracious gift of the gods—a sense of humour. Then I dropped a discreet hint concerning Soto and de Castañeda, but he laughed me into silence, calling me a damned suspicious old ass. I regret now that I held my peace; ridicule will bridle even a shrew’s tongue.

And here I am tempted to throw a pebble at my kind chief. The ways of the Latin are not lightly to be apprehended by the Anglo-Saxon. Would to God that Alvarado had been more candid with me. It seems that he knew that my life was in danger, and that he took this opportunity of considering my safety before his own. And knowing—far, far better than I did—the character of Castañeda, he wished Letty to be safe and snug in the foothills, out of ken of the scoundrels who encompassed her. And, alas! had he only made these matters clear to me, the ends he had in view might have been accomplished. Instead, he merely said curtly:

“Be mum, Juan, about your destination. A man cannot be stabbed when his enemies do not know where he is. Forget not to muzzle your friend. You will start to-morrow.”

“To-morrow!” I echoed. “To-morrow!”

“Certainly—the sooner the better.”

'Twas useless to ask for reasons he chose to withhold; so I returned to Larkin's, and found my foster-brother hot-foot for the chase, diligently cleaning his rifle. He carelessly agreed to speak to none of our plans, but added that in his opinion such mystery was absurd. Just then Letty came in, and, to my consternation, flatly refused to accompany us.

"You *must* come," said her lord.

"Oh, indeed! My wishes, of course, should curtsy to your convenience. Let me tell you I shall not go anywhere—under the lash."

"You deliberately disobey me?"

Her face dimpled with derisive smiles.

"Why not?"

Then she turned to me.

"Dear Johnnie, why should I leave this comfortable house to gratify Courtenay's whim?"

"I am your dear Johnnie, and you are my dear Letty; but, madam, you are also a coquette, and hang me if I'll dance to such measures as you have set of late."

"Let her stay," growled Courtenay. "She would spoil our fun with her tantrums," and he rubbed viciously the barrel of his rifle.

She stood eyeing him disdainfully, and I confess that her obstinacy exasperated me. I had yet to learn that sympathy between the sexes argues—according to the law of periodicity—antipathy. Letty's love for Courtenay had touched her to fine issues. But, alas! Love's rule is also the yard-stick of hate. A woman measures gain by loss.

"Courtenay," she said nervously, "you cannot break me as the colts of this country are broken—by abuse."

I am sure she would have melted with one warm word, which we withheld. "I wish you good sport," she continued, "and also good-bye. What! Not a word? How cross you both are!" Then she walked to the door, and paused on the threshold, a slim, gracious figure, daintily clad in thin muslin, framed in ancient oak. "Good-bye," she murmured. "Good-bye, old John. Good-bye, Courtenay."

My foster-brother turned his back and walked to the window. Letty laughed ironically, and closed the door.

"Go after her," said I. "A kiss will adjust this business."

"No," he answered obstinately; "I won't go."

So I went instead, and found her standing at the other end of the corridor that ran the length of the house. When I urged her to obey her husband, she refused emphatically to leave Monterey.

"I have more than a woman's reason, John. Good-bye, dear. Perhaps I shall have news for you on your return."

"Why good-bye?" I asked, puzzled more by her tone than by her words. "We do not leave till to-morrow."

"I shall sleep to-night at the Casa Estrada."

"What!"

"Your Magdalena came to me this afternoon and entreated my pardon. I have forgiven her the hard words she said to me. And, John, she must melt when she learns how good and faithful you are. Be sure that I shall sing your praises."

I stared at her, sorely perplexed. Yet I remembered that Tia Maria Luisa was now my friend. Moreover, when we first came to Monterey, Letty had passed more

than one night beneath the dame's roof. So misgiving melted, and hope—that had somewhat sickened—took a new lease of life. Seeing that further remonstrance would be fruitless, I kissed my cousin and bade her cheer up.

“There are few dun days in California,” I whispered. “The sun will shine again, Letty, for all of us.”

I did not see Alvarado again, for I was busy at Larkin's, and indeed slept there against an early start upon the following morning. But—as ill luck would have it—as we were riding out of town, whom should we meet but Don Miguel Soto; and, very naturally, he asked Courtenay whither we were bound. The careless fellow answered, before I could wink a discreet lid, “To Carmelo.”

CHAPTER XIX.

LA NOCHE ES CAPA DE PECADORES

WE camped in a delightful spot—a grove of oaks surrounding a cold and limpid pool. Diana addressing herself to the bath could have found no more perfect retreat, for in the soft sand around the spring we marked the slot of deer, and the imprint of bear and puma criss-crossed with tracks of quail innumerable, but of man there was no sign whatever. The reek of our fire ascended from a wooded spur of the Coast Range, while below, obscured by a shimmering golden haze, lay the foothills and valleys of Carmelo; obscured, also, were the peaks of the Santa Lucia mountains; and veiled was the dazzling azure of skies and seas. Indeed, the land and seascape seemed enchanted, lying silent and glowing beneath the spell of autumn. For when the

sweet fall of the year comes to California the trade winds cease their blustering, the pines and chattering cottonwoods sigh no more, the brooks are voiceless, the birds are mute. Yet life does not depart ; it is only suspended. The strange silence is eloquent not of decay, as in less favoured lands, nor of death, but of sleep.

“A dear sweet country,” said Courtenay to me. “Hark! What is that?”

Out of the silence floated the sound of a bell, a magic chime from the belfry of San Carlos. The ruined mission buildings and the rude huts of the Indians were lost to view in the milky mists, but the incantation of sound bewitched the fancy not so easily beguiled by sight (that most matter-of-fact of the senses). So we listened to the bells tolling—as it seemed to us—the requiem of the past. If their silvery tongues murmured peace, a harsh jarring note ever and again proclaimed strife. Ah me! California is still the land of melting mist and golden haze ; the cypress and pine fringe the foothills of Monterey as of yore ; the great combers curl and break upon the bristling rocks of Point Lobos. But, to the great eagles and condors who float high up on motionless pinions, watching and waiting, what changes the years have brought!

We were standing upon the edge of a plateau, whence the ground broke sharply to the south-east in a ragged succession of steep, gulch-seamed slopes. So standing we watched the phantoms of the mist, as they climbed the foothills and scaled the mountain peaks beyond. Through the white glimmer of the skirmishing line shone the rosy gleams of the setting sun, with here and there a steely glint as of spears—lights reflected

from the smooth surfaces of rocks and leaves. A faint perfume of herbs and grasses floated up with the mist, and from the moist lands that border the Carmel creek came the chorus of the frogs.

Being spent with fatigue after four days' hard deer-stalking, this heavenly evening cooled our blood. Courtenay, ever a keen sportsman, had been unusually successful, and yet, watching his expressive face, I knew that he was thinking not of the dead stags, but of a wounded hind. Presently, he said abruptly: "She is only a child. I regret that we parted in anger."

Then we fell to talking of our dear ones, eagerly yet softly, as friends talk when the shades of evening woo to speech halting and reluctant tongues. And now my foster-brother's ardent voice recalled our boyhood, when we would chatter like blue jays upon every subject and object. Of late this intimate communion had ceased.

Suddenly he touched my arm.

"Is there something moving down there?" he asked.

I strained my eyes into the shadows of the mist.

"'Tis an animal," he said, after a pause. "Possibly a coyote lured here by the smell of venison. Egad! Jack, I can smell the buck's liver that is now sizzling over our fire. Come, I've a wolf's appetite."

Later we lay around the camp fire, piled high with blazing cones. These, after giving forth glorious heat and light, burned down till nought was left save a mass of dull red cinders, plastic stuff wherewith to paint pictures or weave fancies.

Soon Procopio began to snore loudly beneath his *serape*, and not an hour had passed before Courtenay followed the Yaqui into the happy hunting fields of

sleep. But I strolled through the suburbs of slumber in pleasant vagabondage, arm in arm with fancy and ambition, those Will-o'-the-wisps of the soul. And if they lured me into a diviner æther, I was still sensible that my body was chained to earth, for the mere cracking of a rotten twig brought me presently to my feet. I listened for another sound, and glanced at the dark forms beside the dying fire. White man and Indian were soundly asleep, fagged out. It seemed a pity to wake them, yet if a grizzly were prowling about I might need them. Again I listened, till the silence became oppressive, and then, being thoroughly awake and in the mood for a walk beneath the stars, took my rifle and slipped quietly into the shadows. At first it was so dark that I failed to distinguish the vast trunks of the oaks. And then a curious horror of the invisible fell upon me, for I was sensible that some animal was stealing stealthily through the under-brush to my right. I caught a faint rustle. Fancy whispered the word—puma! A fierce beast when hungry, the bane of tender calves and suckling colts. The noise ceased when I stood still, but now I marked an ominous crackle to my left. Did pumas hunt in pairs? Heart in mouth, I decided to return to camp and arouse my companions, and, accordingly, swung on my heel, thereby miserably conscious that I had lost my bearings. I might, of course, have cried out, for the camp at most was not a hundred paces from me, but a youngster is always more than half a fool, and Courtenay would twit me for a month if my fears proved groundless. So I stood still for the third time, a poor confounded ass.

A minute must have passed, an æon to me, and beads

of cold sweat trickled slowly down my nose, for I was positively of the opinion that the animals—if animals they were—had not moved, and that the three of us might be included in a circle of small radius. By this time my eyes had somewhat adapted themselves to the mirk, and I could see the trunks of two large trees rising ghostlike from a shadowy tangle of sage-brush and poison oak. Then, through the interlaced boughs above me, I caught a glimpse of Orion's belt, and knew that the camp was in front of me. My fears vanished and I stepped briskly forward. But before I had gone two yards, a crash behind proclaimed pursuit, and as I took ignominiously to my heels, a rifle exploded. Almost immediately I heard the cool voice of the Yaqui: "*Bueno bueno!* Our Lady's bullets never miss. Señor Don Juan, let us look together for the body of Cosmé Servin."

"Can you see in the dark?" I stammered.

"*Ay yí!* I could see you, and that dog of a coyote."

"You cannot have hit him?"

"It is not possible to miss with the bullets blessed by our Lady. When you left camp, señor, I followed. *Huh!* you thought I was sleeping; yet I heard the twig snap when you did. Cosmé Servin is in that bush."

It was as he said. Together we pulled the bleeding wretch from his ambush and dragged him to the camp fire. The others—for others there were—bolted. Courtenay threw more cones upon the fire, and by the light of the flames we examined the wounded man. The bullet had entered the abdomen, and must have touched the spinal cord, for the fellow was completely paralysed from the waist down, and quite unconscious. Brandy

revived him, and he seemed to realise that he was in desperate straits, for he asked faintly for a priest.

"Thou wilt burn in hell before the priest comes," said the Yaqui fiercely, his lean face livid with hate. "Shall I ride to Monterey and fetch Eustachia Bonilla?"

"Silence," said Courtenay sharply. "If he wants a priest he shall have one. Ride to San Carlos. There is one priest, I know, working there amongst the Indians and fishermen. Go!"

Procopio obeyed sullenly. In his opinion punishment here and hereafter was a sentence meet for Cosmé Servin, but for my part I pardoned the man, albeit hating the more his master, the treacherous Mexican.

When the Yaqui had galloped away, we did what we could for the easement of the dying mestizo. Life was ebbing from him painlessly, but he complained of constant thirst, and also of cold. Our ministrations pricked his gratitude, for he thanked us courteously each time we moistened his lips, and smiled his thanks in a ghastly grin. As time wore on and the priest came not, his anxiety was horrible to witness. He had been baptized and educated at one of the southern missions, and the teaching of the padres was bearing fruit, for the good fathers use much colour in discourse, and the horrors of the Indian's Inferno are portrayed by men familiar with the works of Augustine, Origen, and Tertullian. The wretch was twisting his fingers in agonised anticipation of hell's fiercest flames, and nothing we could say, being heretics, sufficed to comfort him. Only the balm of the Holy Oils can heal such wounds.

Finally, as the mist upon the mountains assumed the sea-shell tints of dawn, Procopio and the priest from

Carmel rode up the slopes. The priest was a Zacatecan friar whom I had met before, one who had known and loved, and been beloved by, the famous Padre Junipero Serra. Tall and very thin, but bent and broken by age and infirmity, he was of a pale, pure, and clear complexion, with a lean prominent chin, a thin-lipped mouth, a falcon's beak, and, surmounting a pair of dark, deep-set eyes, a high, narrow, wrinkled brow—the face of an old soldier who has seen more than one stricken field, yet in the evening of life has found peace. He had been an itinerant friar. In hunger and thirst, in sickness and health, in sunshine and storm, he had wandered from mission to mission. Only a poor monk, yet, in the eyes of the Architect, surely a temple of rock crystal with God's lamp set therein, and fed with the oils of poverty, obedience, and chastity. There were many such in early days, who confronted exile, solitude, servitude, and the manifold terrors of the wilderness. A few were scholars, men of gentle birth; the many were artisans—carpenters, masons, and bricklayers—who taught the Indians simple trades and laboured with them each day from dawn till dusk. They had their faults, these friars of St. Francis and St. Dominic; they were stern disciplinarians, intolerant of interference, bigots, if you will, but they were the true sowers in California, the pioneers, to be likened to a placid stream whose waters, flowing slowly on and on, irrigating, percolating, fertilising, bear upon their bosom Christ's gospel of life and love.

Courtenay and I withdrew, leaving the dying man in the priest's care. My foster-brother was much affected, and spoke soberly of life and its duties, of the here and

the hereafter, of the heaven and hell we make for ourselves, and so forth. A violent death, be it of friend or foe, leaves a scar upon the memory. Many years have passed since that night, yet I can recall Courtenay's sombre face and the tones of his voice.

"A vile death in a vile stew is bad enough, old Jack, but a rude exit from such a world as this seems horrible."

Courtenay had ever a poet's appreciation of the beautiful, and also, in marked degree, that interest in others without which man is a poor thing. This had led him into quagmires. The keen eyes of Alvarado apprehended the weakness of such a character. "Your friend," said he, "is a chameleon. That is why he is so charming."

And now he seemed to realise the ignoble part he had played of late, for ever eating, drinking, and jesting.

"I'll mend my ways," he muttered contritely. "Egad! we might be lying stiff and stark by the fire yonder, and I should have had but a sorry record to show the angel. And my poor Letty left alone in a foreign land."

The priest approached, and held up a lean finger.

"Cosmé Servin," said he solemnly, "has but a few minutes to live. Before I grant him the last rites and absolution it is necessary that he should speak with you. Come."

We could mark the signs of dissolution—the livid pallor, the dreadful dew of death—yet the man's eyes still blazed with impatience, the impatience of a soul denied the joys of paradise. We knelt down, and then Cosmé spoke :

"Señores, I was tempted by much gold to come here with two Indians and stab you whilst you slept. With

gold in my hand, plenty of it, I could go to Eustachia and ask her to be my wife. It was love for her, not love for any other, nor hate of you, señores, that tempted me."

"We forgive you," said Courtenay.

The priest bent down and muttered the words of the absolution. Then from the folds of his habit he took a silver-gilt vial that contained the oils.

"Per sanctam unctionem et suam puisissimam misericordiam indulgeat tibi quidquid per visum deliquisti. . . ."

The priest made the sign of the cross upon the man's eyelids, and then rapidly anointed all the different parts of the body in turn, murmuring the same formula. When he had finished, the lips of Servin moved either in praise or thanksgiving, but the sounds were inarticulate. Then the man raised his heavy hand and pointed upward, whilst I marvelled at the rigidity of that pointing finger. No trembling betrayed the weakness of a departing soul. The certainty of forgiveness steeled the muscles as it had already fortified the mind. Then, suddenly, the hand fell with a crash, and the friar began that beautiful apostrophe: "*Proficere, anima Christiana . . . hodie sit in pace locus tuus, et habitatio tua in Sancta Sion. . . .*"

Cosmé Servin was dead.

The breath had scarce left the body of the misguided and unfortunate man when the Franciscan turned to me.

"Señores," said he quietly, "I advise you to ride at once to Monterey. I am not betraying my holy office when I warn you that mischief is brewing."

We gazed at each other stupidly. The landscape was still bathed in mist, and all things seemed grey and

grim. The trees were gigantic phantoms. The skies were a winding-sheet. And at our feet lay the dead Indian, with a smile upon his face, while the priest raised his voice in supplication.

CHAPTER XX.

WITHOUT DRAWING REIN.

I HAVE often thanked my Maker that I am a man, because to the male is given the blessed privilege of action. Who would not sooner work than weep? And work that draws the sweat from the skin and racks strained muscles and sinews is surely a better anodyne than all the drowsy syrups of the pharmacopœia.

That ride in the early morning, with the wet boughs of the chaparral scourging our faces, lasted but one hour. The Yaqui led the way, and spared neither quirt nor spur. In after years I rode over the same ground with an English friend at my side, a man, too, known in the shires as a bold horseman, no mean judge of what a horse and rider can do at a pinch. Yet he shook his head and smiled as we picked our way up a rocky, gulch-seamed slope, down which I told him we had raced at a gallop.

As we jogged into the town, Courtenay pointed out to me a ship at anchor, not far from the moorings of the *Heron*.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "Castillero has come at last."

I wondered whether he had come too late, but the question was answered in a couple of minutes. The town was *en fête* even at that early hour, and on every

lip was the name of my brave and patient chief. Leaving Courtenay at Larkin's, I rode straight to the Governor's house, which I found crowded with friends—truly their name was legion on that day—and amongst them were the comisionado and all the chief men of the north. I soon learned that Alvarado had been formally confirmed as Governor, Vallejo as Commander-in-Chief; while to Carlos Carrillo was given a large island, whither it was hoped he would betake himself. I had never seen his Excellency in finer health or spirits.

"Well, my friend," he said, as soon as we were alone, "I have power now, and shall use it."

"Has any attempt been made upon your Excellency's life?"

"Why do you ask?" he retorted quickly.

"I had reason to believe that mischief was brewing."

"The yeast was not strong enough, my friend. Yes, between ourselves death *has* been near me since you left Monterey. And," his voice softened, "I have reason to believe that I owe my life and what it holds to a woman. I was sitting at my desk reading upon the evening of the day you went to Carmelo when this was brought to me."

He took from his pocket a half sheet of paper. On it were inscribed a few words, obviously written with the left hand: a friend entreated his Excellency to go to bed at ten instead of at midnight—the usual time.

I looked at my chief inquiringly.

"You know my habits, Juan. I can only study when the town is quiet, and I am apt to be engrossed in my work. A man could steal through that window yonder **and** stab me easily, could he not?"

"He could," I assented. "My God! Why did we not think of that before?"

"Or from the top of the wall he could shoot me. 'Twould be a fair shot, even for a poor marksman."

"Your Excellency, I cannot forgive myself for being so careless of your safety."

"It seems," he said gravely, "that God will not permit me to die a dog's death. Well, my friend, that paper was confirmation, 'strong as Holy Writ,' to me of what we had both suspected. Yet I wished to put my doubts to the test. And I hoped to arrest the assassin with my own hand."

"Your Excellency," I said gloomily, "you are not to be trusted alone. You ran a dreadful risk."

"Wait. Only a fool, Juan, runs a risk that may be avoided. Yet some chances a man, if he be a man, must take—matrimony, for instance," and he smiled slyly. "Accordingly, I prepared a dummy that I set in my chair, back to the window; then I armed myself and waited, but I bade the orderly to stand without the door. My fear was that the assassin, if he chanced to be hid in the garden, would see me at my work. And, unhappily, this is exactly what must have happened, for no shot was fired, no man crawled through the open window; and yet, when I searched the garden upon the following morning, I found this."

He laid before me a small tobacco pouch, such as the Indians of Sonora make and sell. They are costly trifles, and never used by the Indians themselves.

"If I could find the owner of this," said my chief softly, "I would send for Quijas. The wretch should not die unshriven."

"That belongs," said I, "to de Castañeda. I can swear that it is his, and there is not another like it in Monterey!"

"I made certain it was he, but I lacked proof. And, Juan, I dared not show this pouch to my—my *friends*, for fear that one of them would warn the scoundrel. Make you aught of that piece of paper?"

I turned it over and over, examining with care the texture of it, the ink, the writing. Then I shook my head.

"Smell it," said my chief.

"*Madre de Dios!*" I exclaimed. Then I paused, crimson with confusion. About that scrap of paper hung a scent familiar to me, the faint odour of an essence used by Magdalena.

"Who wrote that letter?" said his Excellency, in a cold voice.

I hesitated. I could not bring myself to name the daughter of Estrada. Alvarado slapped my shoulder.

"My poor Juan," said he. "Your Magdalena has saved her father's life as well as mine. And do you think I shall prove ungrateful? Well, what remains to be told? The arrival of Castillero has given me a new lease of life. Coyotes will bait a solitary bull; they keep their distance from the herd. Do you know that the comisionado's vessel, *La California*, had not rounded the Punto de los Pinos an hour before that old fox Estrada came to me, entreating my pardon? He gave me the history of the past six months, and swore that my life had never been in danger. I laughed in his yellow face, and even he had the grace to blush. For your sake, Juan, and for the sake of Magdalena, I shall

spare him. But Soto and de Castañeda shall hang high as Haman. A soldier's death is too honest for them."

Then I told him what exactly had passed in the foothills of Carmelo. Before I had finished the story he sent an orderly for Castro, and as soon as that large gentleman entered the room commanded the immediate arrest of the Mexicans.

Castro shrugged his broad shoulders. "The birds are flown," he said, with an oath. "They left Monterey the day before yesterday with two caponeras."

"Curse it!" exclaimed my chief savagely. "Why was I not told of this?"

"We have been busy," muttered the big fellow.

"We?" The emphasis was ironic. "Well, send some soldiers after them at once."

"The men cannot leave before to-morrow," said Castro sullenly.

"It is always to-morrow," said Alvarado savagely. "Well, see to it that no blunders are made."

When Castro had gone, he said: "Narciso will give you Magdalena, and I fancy the maid is willing enough, for she has made friends again with your cousin. And yet," he sighed, "I could wish, Juan, that you had chosen another. Ay, you say she is a Bandini, but she is also Estrada."

"I love her with all my soul," said I fervently.

He went to his desk, unlocked a drawer, and took from it a roll of parchment.

"Here is your title," said he, "to the lands once owned by the Marquis of Branciforte. The papers have been prepared for a long time: they were signed yesterday." And as he spoke I made certain—poor fool—

that our worries and perplexities were at an end. The barque that bore Cæsar and his fortunes had crossed the troubled waters. And so far as Cæsar was concerned I was right. From that hour Juan Bautista Alvarado became the autocrat of Alta California. What happened to him afterwards has become a chapter in the world's history, a chapter not without interest to the Anglo-Saxon race. But let this be said of him—in the hour of triumph he forgot not his friends.

I took the papers he gave to me, and stammered my thanks.

Then, for the first time—for he was the most undemonstrative of men—he took me in his arms and kissed me solemnly on both cheeks. It was a joyful minute for both of us.

Soon after I left him and went at once to Larkin's, where I expected to find Letty. My foster-brother came forward to meet me, a frown upon his face, and in his hand a letter. He told me that Letty and Magdalena were not in town. Tia Maria Luisa had a kinsman who owned a beautiful rancho on the banks of the Salinas, and to this the girls had gone to attend a big rodeo.

"Old Narciso took them," said Courtenay, absently. "Yes, it really looks, Jack, as if we had come into smooth water at last."

I was not aware that Master Courtenay had been in rough water, but I said nothing, for I saw from his face that he was deeply affected. Then he handed me the letter, which was in my mother's writing. I read a dozen lines. Austin Valence was dead.

I took his hand and pressed it.

"My dear Courtenay, what can I say to you?"

"Nothing," he replied gravely. "He was my enemy and my brother. Ah! John, old friend, death tears the veil from our eyes—doesn't it? The evil that was in him, poor fellow, is in me also. Finish the letter."

"Sir Marmaduke" (wrote my mother) "is sorely afflicted. Yet I cannot doubt that his hard heart is softened. Come home, Courtenay, you are wanted here, and England is surely the best place for you and the little lass. . . ."

There was much more in the same strain.

"My mother is right, Courtenay; you had better return as you came, in the *Heron*."

He protested that he would not leave me, but I could see that in fancy his mind was seven thousand miles away.

A clod is in its element out of doors, but the same piece of clay transmuted into porcelain is seen to better advantage in a drawing-room. I was naturally simple, he complex, versatile, volatile, but always charming. I have since come to the conclusion that fascinating persons are innately selfish. Because they please themselves, because they cultivate assiduously the *joie de vivre*, they please others. But I did not find this out for many years.

As I was thinking sadly of the sweet vale of Itchen and my mother's dear face, Quijas entered, wearing a very sour look. It must distress the sons of Holy Church to find themselves burdened with secrets which untold may work mischief to their friends. Quijas had seen Procopio, and doubtless had learned from him

details withheld from heretic ears. Perhaps, too, the Indita, Eustachia Bonilla, knew more than she confided to her lover.

"You look cross, padre Quijas," said I. "But Courtenay has just told me that we are in smooth water. His Excellency triumphs, his enemies have vanished."

"Vanished!" said Quijas, somewhat contemptuously. "If I were you, señores, knowing as you do what manner of men these Mexicans are, I would make sure of that. Alta California is too small a country to hold them and you."

I was silent, sensible that de Castañeda and Soto driven to the wall were about as dangerous and treacherous as tigers. Courtenay rose at once with an air of determination.

"We can talk just as well in the saddle," he said significantly. "Come, Jack, I shan't be happy till Letty's hand lies in mine."

"I'll go with you," said Quijas bluntly. Then he asked if we were well armed. I noted that he borrowed a pistol and a puñal, weapons banned and barred to a friar. "*Virgen Santisima*," he growled to me, "I carry these, my son, to the glory of God and the undoing of His enemies."

"What! You look for a fight?"

"Though the sun shine, leave not thy cloak at home. Perhaps we borrow trouble, but *quien sabe?* The rattlesnake strikes when the colt is grazing."

His words made us very uneasy. Courtenay took me aside while our horses were being saddled, and said despondently, "That devil has sent his Indians to kill us, so that he might deal as he pleased with Letty. The

sweet soul may be now in his clutches. What a blind fool I have been!"

My fears marched with his, a choir invisible.

"Is Magdalena to be trusted?" he asked abruptly.

Now this question I had not dared to answer.

"There may be some plot," continued my foster-brother. "A jealous woman sticks at nothing. Why should she kiss the cheek she has slapped? Curse it! Not half-an-hour ago I told you that we were in smooth water. And now——"

I consoled him—and muzzled my own misgivings—with a few obvious arguments. Magdalena—I pointed out—being a Latin would doubtless prefer to make her peace with me indirectly, and having wronged Letty in thought would make extravagant amends in deed. The old Don, too, might now be counted as a friend. He, at least, dared compromise himself no more. And so on and so forth.

At nine we again took the road, and galloped without drawing rein till we came to the broad ford of the Salinas, flashing and sparkling in the sunlight. 'Twas piping hot, and our horses were spent. California, be it remembered, is a twin. The California of matins and vespers is fresh and dewy, perfumed, melodious, a chromatic scale of colours, sounds, and odours; but the California of high noon is sun-scorched and dusty, bare and bleak, scentless, a monotone.

"*Carajo!*" exclaimed the Yaqui, as we stopped at the ford to water our cattle and tighten the slackened girths, "a draught of Padre Duran's aguardiente would be sweeter than a kiss from Eustachia."

While he was speaking the keen eyes of Quijas had marked a milky stain upon the horizon. This soon became a pillar of dust, and as we rode to meet it the forms of a man and mule were made manifest.

“’Tis your friend the Jew,” said the priest.

From Solomon we gleaned rank weeds—doubt, disappointment, stinging fears. He had attended the Castro rodeo and reported the presence there of Castañeda and Soto. This audacity on their part whetted fresh apprehensions. At the same time we were enchanted to learn that Letty was safe and sound in old Narciso’s charge.

“You left them at the ranch-house?” said Courtenay.

Solomon replied that Soto and de Castañeda had left the ranch at dawn with their caponeras and Indians, and that two hours after Narciso and his party had set out for the capitol.

“But there is only one road. Why have we not met them?”

Solomon shrugged his fat shoulders.

“Why have we not met them?” repeated Courtenay.

Procopio explained that possibly Don Narciso had stopped for rest and refreshment at a small place that belonged to him, known as La Laguna Seca, situate about a mile from the high road. This seemed so probable that we plucked up our spirits. It was insufferably hot, no Spaniard, with ladies in his company, would brave the rigours of a midday journey.

“What road did the Mexicans take?” asked Quijas.

That question the Jew could not answer. Accordingly we bade him God-speed, and rode on again rather lighter of heart. Quijas, galloping at my side, spoke of Magda-

lena, and his cunning tongue conjured up a score of scenes. I could see the little maid at her devotions—the *alabado*, chanted always at dawn, echoed in my ears. I could see her at play, at hoodman-blind, ducks and drakes, hide-and-seek, the same games dear to English children. I could see her, a pathetic figure, *en penitencia*, kneeling in a corner of the big *comedor*, before a hide-covered stool, on which was laid in mockery a cup, a platter, and a spoon (suggesting a Barmecide's feast), while at the long table her stern-faced father and his guests gorged heavily. I could see her, a maiden of thirteen, overlooking with kindly eyes the labours of the Inditas, standing in the laundry beside the snow-white, sweet-scented piles of linen, whose finest pieces had been hemmed and embroidered by her own fingers, or in the kitchen upon the eve of a fiesta, or last of all, when the day's work was done, seated on the long cool varandal, her fingers caressing the strings of her guitar, while from her lips, out into the starry silence, floated the mournful love-lilts of Spain and Mexico.

This fluent talk beguiled the time, and ere long we topped a ridge below which lay the dried-up lake that gave the grant its name. The ranch-house, a small adobe, stood upon the farther shore, with a stone corral hard by, but of human life there was not a sign, not even a reek of smoke.

“The place is deserted,” exclaimed Courtenay.

We skirted a lake fringed with a rank growth of *tule* and rushes, and drew rein at the closed door of the adobe. In and around the corral were the fresh hoof-marks of many horses. Castañeda and his caponeras had evidently come and gone.

"We waste our time," said Courtenay impatiently. "I doubt whether the ladies have been here at all."

Procopio suddenly spurred his horse to a canter, swung from the saddle, and picked up a white object.

"They have been here," said I, as Procopio tendered me a piece of linen. "This is Letty's handkerchief."

We looked at each other, while Quijas with a nod to the Yaqui to follow him, rode around the buildings and corral. When he rejoined us his large face was black with misgiving.

"There is the road to Monterey," he pointed due west. "Castañeda and those with him are riding north."

"Then our course is north," said my foster-brother. "Curse it!" he broke out, "what does this mean?"

Quijas answered: "What I feared has come to pass. The ladies have been abducted."

"And we stand prating about it. Mount, man, mount."

Quijas held up his hand. Authority sat enthroned on his massive brows. Never had I liked the man so much as now.

"*La noche es capa de pecadores*" (night is a cloak for sinners), quoted the friar softly. "'Twill be night, Señor Valence, in one hour, our horses are not fresh; we are four against a possible ten; we must make haste, my friend, slowly. Am I right?" He turned to me.

I did not answer.

"We must procure horses and men, an Indian trailer——"

"You can leave that to me," said Procopio, in his peculiar, guttural tones. "*Huh!* what was that?"

He and Quijas had dismounted, and had uncinched

their horses. Now the Yaqui ran quickly to the adobe, tore the heavy shutter from one of the windows, and, peering within, uttered a loud cry. The rest of us were at his heels in an instant.

"*Dios!*" exclaimed Quijas, "it is Don Narciso bound and gagged."

We entered the hut and released the old man, who glared savagely at us whilst we cut the raw hide thongs. The gag had paralysed his jaw. Quijas poured some brandy down his throat, and presently the words came in jerks, as if the speaker's tongue had the spring-halt.

"What does he say?" asked Courtenay.

"Nothing but curses so far," replied the friar.

The old fellow, still stammering incoherently, pointed a trembling finger at Courtenay. Rage rather than weakness impeded speech. Finally we interpreted his story. Soto and de Castañeda had carried off Lettice and Magdalena. Then the Don fell to cursing again.

"Don Narciso," said Quijas, in his deepest bass, "the saints will not suffer this outrage. *Vaya*, we must be moving. Every minute is of consequence."

"You are going to Monterey—no?"

"Assuredly."

"I ride north," said Courtenay, and his lips were set in a curve I knew well. Sir Marmaduke used to say that his wife had been the most obstinate woman in Great Britain.

"That is madness, Señor Valence."

"Perhaps. Good-bye, Jack."

"I follow you," said I.

"*Caramba!* You cannot trail them, you——"

"I go with the caballeros," observed Procopio, vault-

ing into the saddle. "And, father, I have five of my blessed bullets yet."

The friar shrugged his vast shoulders. "So be it," he murmured. "One fool makes many. Don Narciso, you must share my horse."

The old man stood up, very stiff and pompous.

"Must," said he, "is a word that has no meaning to an Estrada. I shall accompany these gentlemen. I have no horse, you say? *Bueno!* I will take the Yaqui's. He can run. His nose will be nearer the ground."

Finally, it was agreed that Quijas should carry our ill news to his Excellency. He promised to return with the soldiers detailed to arrest the Mexicans.

Then, without setting foot in the stirrup, he sprang to the saddle and spurred his sorrel into a gallop. Don Narciso mounted Procopio's horse. The Yaqui ran swiftly forward. We followed.

Now, despite my own anxiety and dismay, I could not help marking the peculiar expression upon Courtenay's face. Suddenly he turned to the Don and said savagely, "This may be no rape."

"What!" I exclaimed, "you think Letty is a party to this outrage? You are mad."

"You insult my daughter," said old Narciso, with much dignity.

"God forgive me," my foster-brother muttered to me. "I am indeed mad, John; and I have been mad for months, neglecting the sweetest wife man ever had."

Then he fell into such a black melancholy that I did my best to comfort him.

"I have a feeling," he said shudderingly, "that I shall never look into Letty's blue eyes again."

CHAPTER XXI.

CASTAÑEDA RIDES FAST.

BEFORE we had gone a mile—Procopio running ahead like a sleuth-hound, and the rest of us following at a sharp canter—I told myself that we had set forth on a fool's errand. Yet any course save that of due north would have shamed our manhood. The tracks of our quarry lay across the sand-dunes that skirt the curving shores of Monterey Bay. Without doubt, so Procopio said (and Estrada was of the same opinion), the abductors, knowing that pursuit was certain, would endeavour to reach a certain wilderness, known as the "pilarcitos" a labyrinth of thick willows, the sanctuary of half the cut-throats in Alta California. Thence they would cross the mountains into the Santa Clara Valley, and push on with all speed to Castañeda's rancho near the town now named Pleasanton. They had many horses and sufficient food for themselves. How could we on our jaded beasts, ourselves worn out, without food, compete with Castañeda and his caponeras? That question I asked myself a thousand times.

Fortunately for us the moon was at its full, and soon her lamp hung resplendent in the heavens. None the less we travelled but slowly, making many halts, for at times the trail would have baffled any man save one of Indian blood. Finally, we camped in the lee of a dune, the Don insisting that the horses were spent, and would surely fall dead if we pressed them farther. So far Castañeda had avoided all ranchos, so we had been unable to obtain fresh mounts, but Procopio told us

that on the morrow, crossing the valley, we should find both horses and food. I noted with some amusement that the Yaqui and Don Narciso spread their blankets and serapes close to the fire we had kindled, placed their heads in the hollows of the great saddles, pulled their sombreros over their eyes, and in three minutes were fast asleep. Courtenay and I talked, unable to sleep on account of anxiety and cold, for there was a sharp frost and a north wind that froze the marrow in our bones. Suddenly, about four of the morning, the Yaqui sprang to his feet. Old Estrada pulled out his long knife, the only weapon he had, and we looked to the priming of our pistols. Listening intently, I could hear the faint tinkle of a bell, and presently, through the mists of early dawn, I saw a colossal figure. It was the good Quijas. As he flung himself from the horse and stretched his cramped limbs by the smouldering ashes of our fire, he explained that he had met not far from Monterey a friend and had borrowed from him a caponera and a vaquero.

"'Twas a kinsman of his Excellency," said the friar; "and he promised me to return on my horse to the capitol and advise Juan Bautista of what scoundrels were loose in California. Of course the soldiers from the presidio will follow hot-foot on our trail. Castañeda has many Indians, so there is like to be a fight. Ho, ho! Don Narciso, that knife of yours shall carve a Mexican's face."

The old fellow nodded. He looked gaunt as a coyote in the morning light, and was licking his lips, displaying his white teeth in a grin.

Meantime the vaquero and caponera came to a halt

not fifty paces away, and we hurriedly decided to continue the chase at once. Quijas had not closed his eyes, but he looked the freshest of the party. Of the *gente de razon* he had least at stake. So we saddled up, drank a draught of cold water, and with nothing heavier beneath our belts galloped on. To our left lay that sea of glory, the bay of Monterey; to our right were the sand-dunes; in front were the green forests of pine and sequoia; above was the stainless sky. Lord! how the sun streamed upon our necks and heads as we rode through the clouds of fine white dust, sweating and choking. Toward noon Quijas espied a small adobe about a mile from the trail, and we agreed that 'twere wise to stop for an hour to rest and refresh ourselves. Before we came to the door of the hut—for it was nothing more—our nostrils were violently assailed by a most pungent smell, proceeding, as we soon discovered, from a large pot containing a guisado, that noble Spanish stew wherein beef, chillies, tomatoes, onions, and many odoriferous herbs—ay, and *dos dientes de ajo*, a touch of garlic—met and mingled in sweet and perfect intimacy.

“*Ave Maria Purisima del Refugio!*” exclaimed the friar, as we passed the threshold, and straightway a black-browed woman went down upon her knees and began to patter the Bendito. Quijas rubbed his large hands together as he peered into the steaming pot. “Your guisado, my daughter, is worthy of a Zacatecan’s benediction.”

“He thinks of nothing but eating and drinking,” said Courtenay, impatiently, in my ear.

I blushed. God knows that the cruellest anxiety had

me by the throat, yet the stew smelled good, although perhaps the testimony of a yeoman upon such a matter may be impugned by those of higher degree. I marked, however, that Master Courtenay disdained not the cheap and fiery red wine that was set before us in a huge earthenware pitcher.

As we ate the good wife chattered with Quijas. Her husband, it seemed, had seen Castañeda and his party some hours before, but had not spoken to them, being at a distance. Several Indians were reported to be with them, and all rode fast. Knowing what fast riding beneath a Californian sun means, my very flesh melted in sympathy with our dear ones, yet, strenuous flight being of necessity the first consideration, I doubted not that Magdalena and Letty had suffered so far nothing more serious than fatigue and discomfort. As we talked a baby swinging in a small hammock (and quaintly linked to its mother by a light cord, so that she could rock her child whilst busy with domestic duties) began to bawl.

"*Tate, tate,*" said the mother. "*Quiete la boca!* Yoscolo is coming. Yoscolo!"

The child instantly stopped whimpering, and I asked the mother what magic lay in the name Yoscolo. Quijas said that it belonged to an Indian who for many years had terrified the fathers as well as the children of Alta California. Finally, in '34, the fellow had been captured, and for many months his head rotted upon the point of the flagstaff that stands next to the cross in front of the Santa Clara Mission. The woman said, with a shudder, that once when she was praying at the foot of the cross a tuft of coarse hair had fallen upon

her shoulder from the grinning skull above. Prayer, she added naïvely, had been turned into panic. This story begat others, and Quijas spoke at length of the fierce warriors whose tepees were to be found along the northern and eastern frontiers—the Notontos, Talches, Telames, and Chausilas. Meantime the husband of our hostess had ridden up, and listening to these tales he said gruffly that there were hostile Indians in the neighbourhood of the San José Mission, and that the rancheros in the Santa Clara Valley had lost of late many cattle and horses.

“Indians never attack men,” said old Narciso, who came from a country where the gentle digger is indigenous.

Quijas and I, although we had read Vallejo’s bloody records, were in no mood to contradict the Don. He had eaten more than the burly friar, and now professed himself ready to take the road again.

“Indians,” he muttered, “are coyotes; but these Mexicans,” and he cursed them living and dead, “are wolves.”

“Pay court to the old man,” whispered Quijas to me.

I tried to profit by this good advice, but the Don answered me in monosyllables. None the less his glance, when it lingered on my face, had less of dislike in it, and his complexion seemed less bilious.

And now I would that a yeoman’s pen could do justice to the good friar who cheered us all with many a quip and story. For each he had the proper medicine: a word of cheer for Courtenay, an argument for me, an apophthegm for the Don, a jest for the Yaqui, a prayer for the other vaquero, who proved a pious soul. Never

did man better beguile a long and miserable day's travel. If I had liked him before, I now loved the big kindly, mirth-loving fellow. And if in his case practice limped somewhat behind precept, what of it? As he said with his jovial laugh: *Del fraile toma el consejo pero no el ejemplo* (do as the friar says, not as he does). The Franciscan who brought the sacred oils to Cosmé Servin was a saint; the Zacatecan was a man.

That afternoon, I remember, brought to light a piece of cruelty that served to further whet our apprehensions of what might befall two weak women at the mercy of such men as de Castañeda and Soto. We found near the trail two heifers streaming with blood. From these poor beasts had been cut what is called the "frazada," the tender steak that lies along each side of the backbone. This removed, they had been left to perish miserably.

We rode on and on through the lovely Santa Clara Valley, galloping at times through thickets of wild mustard five feet or six feet high. The trail became plainer as we neared the Mission of San José, but the Yaqui was of opinion that Castañeda was riding much faster than we. At the mission we learned that the party had been seen some twelve hours before, so borrowing fresh horses we pushed on through the night. Finally, we came to the creek that flowed past the Mexican's stronghold. Into this we waded, and rode at a walk up stream till within a mile of the buildings. By this means we left no tell-tale tracks, and presently were lying snug in thick manzanita. By this time the night was almost spent, but Procopio undertook a reconnaissance, and was absent upwards

of two hours, returning at last with a meagre report. There were about forty Indians, more or less armed, two mestizos, and, of course, Soto and Castañeda, a force too great to be openly attacked. Yet we dare not postpone action till the arrival of the soldiers. Quijas said that after such a journey the Mexicans would give their prisoners time to rest and refresh themselves. According to the padre, abduction in the eyes of a Latin lover is a venial offence. Without doubt Soto—conceited ass—expected more than forgiveness from Magdalena. Many wives in Alta California had been obtained by force and fraud. So, for the present, violence was not to be feared from him. But the case of Letty and de Castañeda was of a different complexion. What horrors, poor child, she must be suffering. If we could only advise her of our presence she might endure with fortitude the rigours of captivity, and perhaps find means to escape. Now it chanced that as a boy I had learned to whistle like a bird, and could imitate amongst other notes the peculiar glug, glug of the nightingale, a bird unhappily quite unknown in California. I had often called Letty with this note, and if it fell upon her quick ears our object would be accomplished. The Indians, as Procopio pointed out, might detect me, but they were like to spend the morning gorging. At any rate, I determined to risk discovery, not, however, without protest on the part of the others. Before starting I exacted from all a promise that if I were captured no rescue would be attempted till the arrival of the soldiers. This they reluctantly gave, and about dawn I started, following the sinuous trail of the Yaqui till I lay within two

hundred paces of the house. From my coign of vantage, a large sage-brush, I could see that the Indians were already astir, and presently an immense quantity of coarse food, meat, and pinole was brought out and poured into troughs. Around these the redskins gathered like a herd of swine, and began to stuff themselves. At another time the sight would have tickled me, but smiles come not easily to men when the lives and honour of their women are at stake. So I watched and waited, marvelling at the amount of food these fellows stowed away. Presently the troughs were empty, and the smoking began. Then one of the mestizos stalked from the low door of the adobe, and gave some orders to half-a-dozen vaqueros. By his gestures I apprehended that he was sending them out as scouts, and one galloped by within two rods of the bush where I lay. You may be sure that I returned thanks for the Yaqui's cunning in taking to the stream.

It must have been nine o'clock when, to my great joy, both Letty and Magdalena appeared upon the varandal. A bench was brought, and the ladies sat down. My opportunity had come. At first I whistled softly, chirping till I made certain that my throat and lips would not betray me. Then I essayed the familiar call, and at once Letty cocked her pretty head. I stopped whistling, and saw Letty whisper to Magdalena. Then I called again. At the second call Letty drew a handkerchief from her bosom and waved it as if she were beating off a fly. Then I knew that my work was done. And now the question of retreat had to be determined; no easy matter, for I am a large man, and the cover—now that the sun was up—looked mighty thin. None the less I

judged it all-important that I should rejoin my companions, for obviously Castañeda was not expecting an attack. Had he anticipated, or even apprehended pursuit, he had not paralysed the activities of his Indians with meat and pinole. Some of the men, it is true, were on duty, but I reckoned that a sudden attack would put them to rout. At any moment the vaqueros might return bringing news of us, for an Indian's eye is marvelously keen. So, bearing these things in mind, I began to crawl stealthily through the grass, but I had not gone a hundred yards, when the thud of galloping hoofs fell on my ear. I crouched down, guessing that a vaquero was passing, and then, quicker than I can set it down on paper, I heard the peculiar hiss of the reata, and an accursed coil of rawhide wound itself around my shoulders, pinning my arms to my side. A second later I was being dragged over the rough, flinty ground, and could feel the sharp stones tearing my clothes and my flesh. Then, my head having struck some rock or jagged stump, I lost consciousness and drifted gently out into an ocean of oblivion.

CHAPTER XXII.

“EN BOCA CERRADA NO ENTRA MOSCA.”¹

WHEN I opened my eyes I was sitting in an arm-chair, bound hand and foot, with an intolerable buzzing in my ears, and a feeling in my body as if I were one big bruise from head to heel. Opposite to me, coolly smoking a cigarette, stood Castañeda, and behind him Soto.

“Welcome to my poor house,” said the Mexican; “it is yours.”

¹ Spanish proverb.

I could hear but indistinctly, but it seemed to me that some one was sobbing in the next room. Castañeda grinned, and the cruelty of the man lay like a loathsome sore upon his handsome face.

"The señora is tender-hearted," he said softly.

Of course, both Letty and Magdalena had witnessed my capture. My wits came back to me.

"You must have ridden fast, Don Juan. Well, where are the others?"

"I dare say they will pay their respects to you soon."

"The sooner the better," he retorted grimly. "I have burnt my ships. By the way, señor, I must thank you, we must thank you—eh, Miguel?—for your kind offices on our behalf with Juan Bautista."

Soto scowled at me. He had none of Castañeda's audacity. He knew that Alta California would soon be ringing with the story of an attempted murder and a cruel rape, and perhaps he had already found out the nature of his partner in crime.

"Saw you aught of Cosmé Servin?" said Castañeda nonchalantly, and when he said this I knew that the man realised that he was an outlaw. I remember what rage possessed me because I was bound, and must die without the privilege of striking a blow, lassoed like a clumsy calf.

"Cosmé Servin is with the saints," said I.

"He repented at the last. Well, he blundered. *Que lastima!* And so have you. Pray excuse me."

He left the room, and I heard him speak to the mestizos outside. Although he spoke quickly and in a low tone, I gathered that an immediate departure was commanded, and through the open door I could see the

half-breeds kicking the sleeping Indians lying gorged around the troughs.

"Don Miguel," said I, "save these ladies and my life, and I'll give you a thousand pesos, and guarantee his Excellency's pardon and your passports into Mexico. Aid and abet this devil, and as sure as God will punish you hereafter, so also shall you pay the last and most ignominious penalty here."

His queerly-coloured eyes glittered, and he glanced furtively at the open door. His gills were white, and 'twas plain he had no stomach for his job. Yet I doubted whether he had the nerve to bell such a tiger-cat as Castañeda. On a horse he was afraid of nothing, afoot he was ever a coward.

Before he could answer there was a crash on the panels of the door leading to the room where I made sure the ladies were confined. The lock was but a flimsy one, and gave way. Then I saw what had happened. The room beyond was the sala; Letty and Magdalena, hearing my voice, had dragged an old horse-hair sofa into the middle of the floor, and using it as a battering-ram, had burst open the door. They ran swiftly and knelt down at my side.

"My poor John," cried Letty, sobbing.

"Juanito," murmured Magdalena, "canst thou forgive me?"

Soto watched her, his face yellow as an orange with bile and jealousy. Then he walked to the door and called loudly for Castañeda.

"Letty," said I, addressing her in English. "Letty, you will be surely rescued, so cheer up." Then I turned to the sweet, passionate face at my knee. "And thou,

Magdalena, hast been more sinned against than sinning," and as I spoke I thought of that other Magdalene to whom much was forgiven—*quia multum amavit*.

"Thou dost not know," she sobbed; "when I tell thee what I have done thou wilt curse me."

She rose to her feet, for Castañeda was darkening the threshold. He came forward and bowed to Letty, who shrank from him. Magdalena confronted him. If disdain were poison, he had died at her feet.

"Señora," he began, addressing Letty, "I wished to spare you this. But, perhaps, it is well that you should learn the extent of my debt to this gentleman, and also how it may be cancelled. Pray be seated."

They remained standing.

"Thanks to him," and his voice was the voice of a familiar of the Holy Office, "I am a ruined man."

I did not care to dispute this lie. He waited a moment, and then continued. My eyes fell upon the scar, livid against the blue-white of his cheek.

"Yes, señor," he touched the scar lightly, "that is the first entry. Then he robbed me of the Rancho Santa Margarita."

"Oh! you brute," said Letty, rightly apprehending the insult to Magdalena.

"Naturally I cared nothing for *her*, after seeing you, señora. Let me add that I never saw you look more handsome than at this minute. Let me continue; to your cousin here I owe the loss of Alvarado's favour."

"His favour," echoed Magdalena. "*That* you never had."

"Now I am banished, disgraced. My lands, my cattle, my horses, are forfeit to the State. Do you

think it was wise, señor, to push a man like me to such extremity? But I have friends in Mexico, good friends, rich and powerful, so I do not despair. But Mexico is far off, and Alvarado's soldiers are doubtless near. So we must take the road at once, a rough road, I fear. And I am sure, señora, you will come with me quietly, for I am prepared to buy your gratitude. In a word"—his voice rose, as excitement gripped him, and the lines deepened about his abominable mouth—"in a word, it lies with you whether this enemy of mine lives or dies."

"Go back to your room," I said hoarsely.

But the women would not budge. Horror held Letty spellbound: Magdalena's fiery eyes were on Soto, who cringed and cowered. He, at least, had no rich and powerful friends in Mexico or elsewhere.

"Shall he live or die," continued Castañeda very softly. "Pass your word to come with me quietly, and in due time you, señora, shall become my wife. I can offer you far more, believe me, than that popinjay, your husband, can give. You, señorita, shall marry Soto, whom any maiden can love."

The sneer was not wasted upon the *soldado distinguido*. I wondered whether Castañeda's sharp ears had caught my offer.

"If you *refuse*," said the Mexican, "dishonour remains. Dishonour and death for this man, not the death either that a caballero would wish to die."

"Go, go!" I beseeched, for the agony in the women's faces was dreadful to see. "Let me answer this coward."

Magdalena interrupted me.

"No, no, don't anger him. See, I will pray to him."

She fell on her knees before him, sobbing with passion and grief. And I sat there unable to stir, while the raw-hide ate into my straining muscles. "Spare us," she entreated. "You have good blood in your veins, let that plead for us. Alvarado will pardon you, God will pardon you, if you are merciful to us. And you can take all that is mine, all, all. In the name of your mother, in the name of the Blessed Virgin, in the name of all women who have loved and suffered I entreat you to let us go in peace. *Virgen Santisima! Virgen Purisima! Ave Maria, Nuestra Señora del Refugio!* Touch, O gracious Mother of Sorrows, touch with thy gentle fingers this man's heart!"

Soto turned aside; Letty's eyes filled with tears; my own heart throbbed; for if such prayer as this proved unavailing, was not the corner-stone of faith in peril? And looking upon Castañeda's face I marked the struggle between good and evil; that battle between the sovereign powers of the world; that never-ending strife which leaves its scars on all of us. For the moment I believed that faith and hope and love had prevailed. Then, in eclipse, the light faded, and sin seemed to darken the room. So distraught was Letty that she screamed, and involuntarily I closed my lids, for if the glory of Sinai is blinding to human vision, so also the horror of Sheol is as vitriol flung in the eyes.

"Señorita," he said icily, "your prayers are wasted on me. Seemingly also upon Our Lady."

"Then save him, and do what you please with me."

"Magdalena," I groaned. "Dost thou wish to slay me twice?"

"*Carajo!*" said Castañeda, between his teeth, "you

shall die more than two deaths, señor, I promise you. Unless, of course, the Señora Valence——”

“Letty,” I implored, “surely now you will go? For God’s sake leave this devil and me alone.”

She came towards me, and bending down laid her soft lips upon my forehead. “John,” she murmured, weeping, “is it possible that once we were happy children?” With that she walked bravely into the inner room, while Magdalena rose from her knees. The expression of her face had changed. Now Lettice, in sorrow or joy, was ever Lettice. ’Twere impossible to confound her with another woman. But the daughters of the Latin race are so torn and twisted by their passions that even a lover under certain circumstances may view as a stranger the one being on earth he cares for as his own. The sight of my dear’s face was terrible to me.

“Before I go,” she said slowly, “I must make confession.” Her words had no colour, no warmth. Passion seemed to have exhausted her. Only the eyes glowed.

“Listen, *querido*, and curse me not. What has happened is my fault, mine. Can I blame thee because thou dost love that witch yonder? Yet I love thee better than the Englishwoman. She would not willingly accept dishonour for thee. I would. Let me speak. It was not as he told me,” she pointed to Castañeda, “thou didst have pity on me—no?—because I was lonely and miserable. ’Twas not my money thou wast after?”

“By Heaven, no. I loved thee, Magdalena, only thee. Did I not prove that when I asked thee to fly with me? Was I thinking then of the Santa Margarita?”

“What!” she exclaimed, “thou didst ask me to fly with thee?”

“Ay, in the letter I wrote thee the day after I played the Jew.”

Magdalena's voice trembled as she murmured hurriedly, “You wrote only one letter to *me*, which I returned—unopened.”

The slight accent on the *me* did not escape a fond lover. Castañeda laughed. Magdalena glanced at him, knitting her brows.

“I am not speaking of that letter,” I said slowly, “but of another. In it I laid bare my soul. My God! how did it miscarry? I trusted it to Courtenay.”

“Perhaps I can explain,” said the Mexican. “That letter your foster-brother gave to a jealous woman, who opened it and gave it to me, or rather I took it from her. It was written in English, and, translating it, I let her think that 'twas a billet from the Señor Valence to the Señorita Estrada. I have since given it to the señorita; so you see the letter after all never miscarried. Only, I told her that I had found it in the workbasket of Valence's wife.”

In the pause that followed he laughed again. To him this part of the business was comedy. His laughter stirred me to the most strenuous effort of my life; but the raw-hide would have held fast a tiger, let alone a man.

“*Dios de mi alma!*” wailed Magdalena. “Thou wilt never forgive me, *querido*; I believed that letter was written by you to your beautiful cousin. And so believing I became altogether evil. *Ay de mi!* how can I tell thee! See, I whisper it softly, so: I plotted with him. I told him that I would help him to his ends. I said to myself that if the beautiful Letty were dead that thou wouldst love me. But then I could not kill her, *querido*;

I was not so wicked as that, nor would I permit him to kill Alvarado. You can thank me for that, Señor Don Santiago. And this devil told me that I must help him to carry the señora away, that he would take her to Mexico, and that there she would learn to love him, being tired of her foolish, faithless husband, and indifferent to thee. *Dios de mi alma!* I believed him. And then"—her voice sank into a melodious sigh that thrilled every pulse in my body—"and then the good God punished me for my sins. I was taken too—to be given to Miguel Soto. And that first night as we galloped through the darkness Castañeda rode beside us, and said that he had avenged our wrongs; that the Ingleses would never return from Carmelo."

While she was speaking, the Mexican watched me with a leer upon his lips; that smile bred by the cruelties of the bull-ring, by the traditions of the Inquisition, ay—to go back further in the history of his race—by the gladiatorial shows of Rome. Soto was profoundly moved.

"Magdalena," I cried bitterly, "I love thee, only thee."

The words were unheeded. She turned from me and faced her enemy, and I could feel that her eyes were scanning him from head to foot. Then she laughed, and her laugh was as brutal as the man's. I think it even frightened Castañeda, for he said: "It is time this farce was ended."

She nodded, and came back to me. This time her sweet pathetic face was softened and dimpled with love.

"Thou canst never forgive me, *querido*. But, *Dios!* how well I have loved thee! Too well for thy happiness or mine. *Adios, alma de mi vida, adios!*"

Pressing her lips to mine, the flutter of her heart was audible to me. She rose, and passed swiftly to Soto.

"Don Miguel, there are tears in your eyes, so what was in my mind to say to you shall be left unsaid." Then she confronted the other. He met her gaze insolently, and raising his hand began to stroke his moustache.

"Poor Miguel!" he remarked.

She eyed him fearlessly. Then she stooped and grasped the puñal at his garter. Why was she not permitted to kill him—with his own knife? What mysterious justice forbade so righteous a deed? Cor-day had no greater cause. Marat was no greater villain. And I thought she had stabbed him, for her slender arm rose and fell. But the other, as I had reason to know, was quick of eye and hand. As the knife glittered in the air he caught her wrist, tore the weapon from her grasp, flung it to the ground, and then lifting her slight figure in his arms, carried her from the room. Soto approached me.

"Be calm, señor," he muttered. "I will help you, if I can."

I did not see either Letty or Magdalena again that day, for in less than half-an-hour the adobe was abandoned. I was told later that the main body of Indians rode ahead with the women. Soto, I presume, accompanied them, and also the two mestizos. Castañeda, three Indians, and I brought up the rear of the procession. We rode fast for upwards of two hours; then, at a sign from the Mexican, the Indians who led my horse turned sharp to the right. I had noted that two of them carried spades, and wondered

vaguely what whim had constrained my enemy to give me decent interment.

Now we advanced at a walk, Castañeda looking to the right and left, as if seeking something. Presently one of the Indians gave a grunt and pointed to an ant-heap in front of him. Even then I had no conception of what torment I was destined to suffer. Castañeda halted and dismounted. The Indians dragged me from the saddle and began to dig. I watched them almost indifferently, till I saw that the hole was being dug not horizontally but vertically. Then I knew that I was to be buried alive, my head alone being left above ground, exposed to the ravages of the sun, and also—God in Heaven!—to the attack of the ants, for the hole was within a yard of the big heap.

"You have stung me many a time," said Castañeda, with a brutal laugh. "Now in your turn you shall be stung. I am kind, I give you many hours to make your peace with heaven. Only I fear the prayers of a heretic will not avail."

I tried to summon my fortitude, but my blood was as ice in my veins, and my teeth as castanets. This particular form of punishment was practised, I knew, by some of the Indian tribes. If the manner of my death ever came to light it would be supposed that savages, not a so-called Christian, had compassed my end.

Well, I prayed to God to deliver me with such intensity of supplication that my blood once more began to circulate. Who will affirm that the minds of our glorious martyrs were not, even in the last agony, triumphant over their tormented bodies. I can swear that when I prayed (and my prayer was of the simplest,

hardly more than invocation), a certain peace fell on me, and I could listen with no craven teeth-chatterings to the words of my enemy. He was now addressing the Indians in bastard Spanish, reciting my offences. And truly he painted me as a wretch unworthy to nourish ants and buzzards. They listened to his excoriating rhetoric in silence, their eyes fixed upon the distant horizon. When the speaker paused, they exclaimed, as one man, "ow," a grunt indicative of neither approval nor the contrary. It seemed strange to me that Castañeda should deign to explain to these serfs, to justify himself, to indict me. I suppose, amazing as it may seem to a Protestant, that he was actually trying to salve his conscience. To some there is no fly in the cheap ointment of verbiage. When he had finished this ghastly farce, I was dropped into the hole, and the loose earth was shovelled in and packed tight around me. Earth had me in a hellish grip; Heaven, seemingly, had forsaken me. While the Indians were shovelling Castañeda mocked me, entreating the men not to throw dirt into the face of the distinguished señor, asking me if I were comfortable, and the like scurvy gibes. I ground my teeth and made no answer. I was thinking of my friends. Surely help would come from them.

Suddenly Soto galloped up. When he saw my head beside the ant-heap his saffron-coloured face blanched.

"*Madre de Dios!*" he exclaimed. "This is horrible."

"How dared you leave the ladies?" said Castañeda, hoarse with rage. "Go back, you fool! Go back!"

He pointed imperiously to the east.

"I have come," replied Soto, very nervously, "to

plead for this man's life. It is most unwise to kill him."

"Am I killing him?" said the other contemptuously. "The Indians, who practise such gentle arts, have dug the hole and placed him in it. The devil will do the rest."

"But the truth might come out."

"What! With no white witnesses?" As he spoke a curious gleam illumined his eyes. Soto marked the change of expression, and the hand that lay upon the horn of the saddle trembled.

"I think we had better release him and the women."

Castañeda laughed.

"That would be a thousand dollars in your pocket—eh? A good day's work for such as you. I heard what our friend here offered you. And the girl loathes you. That is plain to be seen."

Soto was livid with terror. The snake-like poise of the Mexican's head seemed to fascinate him. He was smitten with a palsy.

"She loathes you, yes. I do not blame her. Tell me, who devised this plan that promised you a rich bride?"

"You, you——"

"Who sent Servin to wipe a rival from your path?"

"That was you, too."

He answered almost mechanically. Castañeda spoke with amazing fluency and ferocity.

"And now you turn on me, you miserable coyote. And you say the truth may come out. And, by God, if you live it will come out. And if you should testify against me, you, even you, would be listened to, perhaps believed. And so, Don Miguel Soto, with infinite regret,

you force me to do—*this*.” With that, as coolly as if he were potting a sparrow, he snatched a pistol from his belt and fired. So true was his aim that not a cry escaped the poor wretch’s lips. As the bullet struck him, he raised his lean hands, reeled in the saddle, and fell from his horse—stone dead. Castañeda turned to me.

“You see, Don Juan, I am not a man to fool with. *En boca cerrada no entra mosca*” (into a closed mouth no fly can enter), “which reminds me that you must be gagged, which, however, will not interfere with the ants.”

At his command I was securely gagged with a thick piece of cloth.

“*Adios*,” said this devil, raising his sombrero, “I leave you, señor, to your reflections. It may amuse you to see the buzzards busy with our silly Soto. Once more *adios*.”

He rode off, followed by the Notontos leading Soto’s horse.

Already I had begun to suffer horribly, for I was sorely bruised and desperately thirsty. The sun, waning to the west, streamed full upon my face, and now and again an inquisitive ant, the herald of grim battalions, meandered slowly round my nose and chin. Soon, I reflected, their myriads would be pouring into my ears, my eyes, my nostrils——

Sick with horror, I fainted. When I recovered consciousness the sun had set, the sea breeze was fanning my cheek, and in the distance I could hear the weird bark of a coyote. This was echoed by another and yet another, till the chorus became unendurable. I was sensible that they had formed a circle around Soto and me, and in the soft radiance of the twilight I could see the first approach. When his eyes countered mine, he

squatted down upon his hams, twenty paces away, his scarlet tongue hanging from slavering jaws. They would not attack till nightfall, and twilight in these latitudes lasts barely an hour. Then I heard a laugh, not unlike that mocking cacaphony which had terrified me when sinking in the quicksands of the Santa Maria River, but I realised that this horrid mirth was my own. Good God! Gagged, in agony of mind and body, raging with thirst, I could laugh! I was therefore on the brink of madness. A touch would despatch me to the inferno of delirium. I closed my eyes and prayed that this might be. When I raised my heavy lids the coyotes had vanished. That augured the approach of some beast or man hostile to them, and soon my strained ears registered a faint crackle as of dry leaves crushed under foot. The *thing*, whatever it might be, was crawling stealthily towards me, and fear again possessed me—the terror of the unknown. Out of the shadows stole a black substance—a monstrous cat, the panther of these northern woods. And then to my amazement the beast raised itself up.

It was the Yaqui. At first he saw only Soto; and then the greatest horror of all had me by the throat—that he would overlook me in the gathering gloom. Yet he had the eyes of the great cat I had supposed him to be. Suddenly he grunted and ran to me. Then, muttering prayers and curses, the faithful fellow cut loose the thongs of the gag, and asked me if I were still alive and sane. I mumbled out some inarticulate answer, and he solemnly thanked the Virgin and all the saints. In less than half-an-hour—though he had no tool save a puñal and a pair of strong hands—he had exhumed me, but I

could not move, and spoke with great pain and effort. However, I made him understand that I was thirsty, so he carried me in his arms to a spring hard by, gave me water and bathed my face and limbs, chafing the latter with slappings and rubbings, a process familiar to all Indians who use the *temescal* or sweat-bath, and as he rubbed he told me what had passed. How he had witnessed my capture, how Courtenay (and I'll warrant he seconded the motion) had pleaded for a rescue, how Quijas had demonstrated the folly of attacking a bullet-proof adobe garrisoned with forty men, how finally they had marked the preparations for flight, and the flight itself.

"Where are the others?" I asked.

"At the adobe, señor, where they await the soldiers. Padre Quijas said that if they did not kill you at once your life would certainly be spared."

"Did he instruct thee to follow me?"

He shrugged his shoulders whimsically.

"No, señor, but——"

"You have saved my life and reason," I said gravely, using the polite "*usted*," as I should with an equal. "We are friends from this hour, Procopio. What I have is yours!"

Then I wondered if we could compete in guile with the Notontos and Suisunes. Even the Yaqui, our brave path-finder, had lived the civilised life so long that eye and brain must have lost much of their cunning. Yet he had trailed me by the grace of God, and faith assured me that by that grace alone our beloved ones would be sustained and eventually delivered out of bondage.

After my own miraculous escape, that certainty

glowed in my heart and warmed my frozen and benumbed limbs.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WHEREIN A PROPHECY OF SCRIPTURE IS FULFILLED.

PADRE QUIJAS hugged me to his broad breast as I fell rather than dismounted from the horse that Courtenay and the Yaqui had brought me. Even the old Don kissed my cheek, foaming at the mouth with impotent rage when he realised that his daughter was in the hands of a devil so pitiless. He swore that he would find no peace here or hereafter till he had slit the throat of his enemy, but I told him curtly that he would have to be content with my leavings, for I reserved to myself the pleasure of speeding this fiend to hell. Indeed I was feverish with the lust of revenge, yet feeling in all my bones and sinews the most terrible weakness, so that I almost lacked strength to eat the good meal they cooked for me. All of us were in black mood, and Courtenay, cursing the delay, beseeched Quijas to take the trail at once. The friar refused to court destruction, and I never saw a countenance of a bluer complexion. 'Twas very plain that he, a Catholic priest, lacked John Charity's faith in modern miracles. He quoted the old proverb, "*festina lente*," saying that our horses would travel the faster after proper food and rest; and he promised to take the road in the morning whether the soldiers came or not. I fell asleep towards midnight, and was wakened about five by a great noise outside. 'Twas Mark Jaynes, a lieutenant from the presidio, and some eight soldiers well armed.

And now began a windy talk that drove Courtenay and me distracted, for the lieutenant, a somewhat pompous fellow, refused to push on, when every minute of delay threatened two fair women with death or dishonour. Finally, Quijas constrained him to do as we wished, observing that a cold trail was as hard to follow as his (the lieutenant's) arguments. I was horribly stiff and sore, but able to sit upright in my comfortable saddle, and so, about nine, we mounted and set forth at a whipping pace. Afterwards when we had passed the place where I had suffered such dreadful torment, the trail turned sharply to the right towards the Mount Diablo Range; and, riding along a narrow path on which a herd of elk had wiped out the hoofmarks of Castañeda's horses, we were compelled to draw rein lest we might overrun our scent. About noon we passed the band of elk (not moose but wapiti). There were thousands of them peacefully grazing upon a plateau knee-deep in bunch grass. Indeed, the whole country was swarming with game—antelope, blacktail deer, bears, and quail by the million. It came in upon my mind as we rode up and up into a purer æther that a fairer paradise never lay beneath the eyes of men. Only in my dreams had I wandered in such enchanted groves and glades. But here they lay, silent and secluded: the haunt of wild man and wild beast. For centuries these had had undisputed possession. Now their reign was at an end.

Riding with Quijas he spoke of the Indians.

"Castañeda," he began abruptly, "has overlooked one thing—the treachery of these Indians. Had he treated them with even ordinary kindness, he might

well hesitate before placing himself, as he has done, in their hands, now——”

My revenge seemed to be slipping from me.

“What! You think they will kill him?”

“I fear it. And then——”

“My God! The women in the hands of those Notontos!”

Quijas nodded and spurred on faster. Not six months before some girls had been abducted by a band of Talches from Tulare Lake, and despite hot pursuit, had not been found alive. My gorge rose as I recalled the details of their fate. Just then old Mark joined us. His stout figure astride a lean sorrel gelding would have moved us at any other time to inextinguishable laughter. He had his cutlass at his side, and the butts of two pistols embellished the wide belt that encircled his paunch. Already he hung out signals of distress, for he was saddle-worn and weary; yet he bespoke us cheerily, as became a bold buccaneer who had fought with Nelson.

“We’re making good leeway. Tell me, Jack, has not this cursed saddle a list to port?”

I assured him that the saddle was cinched right and tight, but he shook his head, holding manfully on to the horn. Then I gave my trouble words.

“Pooh, pooh, my lad. Don’t I know these Indios? A pack o’ coyotes! Treacherous? Yes, yes. But the Mexican has his half-breeds. We’ll overhaul them soon.”

None the less, I felt in every fibre of my being a presentiment that Castañeda would be hoist with his own petard. I recalled the peculiar expression upon the faces of the Notontos, the glitter in their beady eyes, the compression of their coarse lips.

We rode on throughout that day over a rough but most beautiful country, well-watered, and covered with feathery bunch-grass, sweet burr-clover, and luscious alfileria. We passed two rancherias of Indians, but they paid no attention to us, and we paid as much to them. The trail was growing hotter; but how hot it was like to become before many hours had passed none of us guessed. More than once we were thrown off the scent, but the size of the party barred ordinary stratagems, and we divined that Castañeda was trusting to his start and the speed of his horses. Towards nightfall we called a halt, being spent with fatigue and anxiety. Our camping-ground was a potrero, or meadow, which lay high up in the hills, surrounded on all sides by thickets of manzanita and sage-brush, inflammable stuff at all seasons, but tinder itself in the fall of the year. It chanced that that hateful north wind, the tramontana of California, was blowing fiercely. Since noon it had plagued man and beast, inflaming noses, throats, and eyes, till we were nigh blind and hoarse from its ravages. Now all winds on the Pacific slope, save this scurvy Boreas, die down at sunset, so we prepared to suffer as little as might be by choosing a refuge well sheltered from the blast. After a supper of venison and *tortillas* (pancakes) we lay down, and in five seconds I was in dreamland, pursuing Magdalena through the pleasant valley of Itchen, pelting the maid with cowslip balls, while she threw roguish glances and light laughter in return. But run as I might, I could not catch the witch, till at length she bolted into my mother's garden, where, amidst the fragrance of lilac and such sweet spring-blooming plants, I lost her. The dream was of

doubtful omen; but waking, fact put fancy to rout, for I opened drowsy eyes to find Quijas violently shaking my shoulder and to see the north-eastern horizon aflame with light. I thought at first 'twas the Aurora Borealis, but Quijas said hoarsely that the country had been fired, and that the flames, scourged by the north wind, were leaping toward us faster than a horse could gallop. Even as he spoke, and as I staggered to my feet, the Yaqui shouted that we must saddle and ride for our lives down the steep trail we had ascended that afternoon. 'Twas evident that the fire was the work of incendiaries, and only too well had they done their stint. We could hear the fierce, sibilant crackle of the burning grease-wood and the majestic roar of the pines. These trees, in this section of the country, are hoary with streamers of grey moss—bearded, as the Spanish say—and their boles are encrusted with dry lichens. So inflammable is this moss that if you but drop a spark at the base of one of these pines the whole tree will explode with the sound and flame of a gigantic sky-rocket. Now they were popping like minute-guns, while to the right and left the foothills were as an ocean of fire—a wonderful and beautiful spectacle could we have viewed it from some coign of vantage, but now inconceivably terrific and awe-inspiring. Indeed, the old Don fell straightway on his knees, and implored the Blessed Virgin to spare a brand not fit for the burning. Whereat Quijas laid a heavy hand upon his shoulder, and bade him see that his cinch was tight.

In a few minutes we were in full retreat; and we raced many a mile before we found sanctuary. The Indians, who annually burn off vast stretches of country

for some inscrutable purpose of their own, seem to know by instinct or experience (even as the animals) where to find refuge from the devils they turn loose. This mysterious knowledge pertained to Procopio, who guided us to a thickly-wooded knoll, which the flames actually encircled and scorched, yet did not consume. From the summit of this we watched the battle. The flames advanced like irregular cavalry, charging and retreating, forming and reforming with incredible noise and fury. We stood huddled together, as you may see a bevy of quail at the approach of a hawk, and were quite assured that a miserable end was at hand. Then, having done all that mortals could, we knelt down, and Quijas, standing in our midst, supplicated the God of the elements to stay His hand. Above the hiss and bellow of those fiery squadrons we could hear his mellow tones, and old Mark (who had been a Methodist in his pious youth) interrupted him with groans and cries. As the priest pronounced the benediction, vagabond sparks fell in a golden shower all around us. And then—in less time than I have taken to set it down—the hosts of the fire-fiend withdrew, and we told ourselves in awed whispers that our prayers had been heard.

And now I have described an incident so truly amazing that, had it not been attested by many honest men still living, I had surely not dared to write it down, fearing to strain the credulity of stay-at-home readers ever suspicious of travellers' tales. When dawn broke after that night of terror we rode down to the woods below, and these we found swarming with all kinds of wild beasts and birds. Scripture was fulfilled

to the letter, for truce had been declared in the forest. Not only did the panther inspire no terror in the doe, but no terror did we inspire in either. I marked elk, deer, antelope, panthers, bears (both brown and grizzly), lynx, wild-cats, racoons, coyotes, and many others. They gazed at us unconcernedly, as if well assured that we, too, would respect the law of sanctuary. Courtenay whispered to me that such peace might reign for ever when the whole world had been purged and purified by flame.

But, when we broke cover and stood upon the smouldering ashes beyond the oasis, the spell was lifted. The animals followed us into the open, and as soon as they had passed the charmed circle they ran or slinked away, seemingly regaining the terrors together with the freedom of the wilderness. And then Courtenay whispered again that liberty was no synonym of peace, that a universal truce must be bred by fear, that a world quit of strife would mean a world in bondage.

"Great peace have they that love the law," I quoted, having once learned by heart (as a punishment) the hundred and nineteenth Psalm.

"Yes," said my foster-brother, "the peace of them that only fear the law is small, and short-lived."

We rode back over the country traversed the day before. The face of the landscape was indescribably desolate and forlorn. Most of the pines were still standing, appraising, as it were, their loss—what had been a fair and fertile champaign was now a charnel-house.

Without speaking we spurred on across a Dead Sea of ashes, and reached the further shore.

CHAPTER XXIV.

NEMESIS.

QUIJAS and the alférez had ridden north-east, while Courtenay and I chose the opposite direction, hoping to pick up the trail the quicker by dividing our forces. The Yaqui accompanied us. We had galloped some two miles when we found the tracks of the horses, and following these discovered the spot where the party had camped overnight. From this point they had evidently fired the brush. Courtenay and I dismounted, and just then a score of buzzards rose out of the chaparral, whereat Procopio observed that carrion must be lying hard by. His curiosity spurred him to see what animal was dead, and presently he came racing back to us carrying a tale of horror.

"The Indios have killed them!" he shouted.

"*Them*," we repeated aghast, "*them*?"

"Not the doñas," said the Yaqui quickly, and I could have hugged him for that blessed assurance. "No, señores, but the mestizos are there," and he pointed to the place whence the grim birds had flown.

What we found there had been half devoured by the buzzards, but we saw that the heads were missing, and the Yaqui explained with some unction that the Notontos never scalped their victims, but beheaded them, taking the trophies to some favoured maidens as a love-token. 'Twas plain that the Indians had revolted, and remembering the dreadful welts on the back of Cosmé Servin, I wondered, shuddering, what had been the fate of Castañeda. The Yaqui began to speculate on this, reciting, in his impassive tones, the different tortures in

vogue amongst the northern and eastern tribes. Courtenay roughly bade him be silent. Perhaps my foster-brother's rebuke had been more fittingly bestowed on John Charity. The savage lies beneath the Christian's skin, and I was mordantly sensible that my vengeance had been taken from me.

Meantime, those hideous gluttons were circling overhead, waiting and watching. My eyes followed their movements as they wheeled hither and thither on outspread, motionless pinions. The mystery of that flight is as the mystery of death. Presently one swooped down into the brush, then another, and still another.

"What does that mean?" said Courtenay, and his lips trembled, as he looked meaningly into my eyes.

"Castañeda is there, and——"

We dared not finish the sentence. In sickening doubt and horror we mounted and rode on, the Yaqui going first. As we crashed through the brush, the great birds rose again. Three had flown to the spot we were approaching. Five flapped upwards, now. The sun fell upon their horrible bald heads and stained beaks.

I may not set down in plain English what we discovered a minute later. By the irony of fate, the Notontos had done unto my enemy what he had tried to do to me. He was quite dead—killed by the ants; and the awful, ghastly torment to which his face bore witness racked us too, and seared for ever our memories. There are things, as I say, too loathsome to be described. Yet, surely, it is well that fancy should at times enter the charnel-house. Not often, for we might go mad, but once and again; so that the question may be met and answered: Might not a similar fate have overtaken us?

So died, in torture unspeakable, a man who hated me with a malignity happily rare. He had been a traitor, a tyrant, a beast. Once he had lain an innocent babe in his mother's bosom. Can one doubt that he was the architect of the evil within him? I learned many years after that the Notontos had cut every sinew in his body before committing it to the earth, but they could not wring a cry from their victim. He had all the vices and one virtue—Fortitude.

Of the three of us Courtenay was most affected.

"My God!" he cried, "I counted him my friend. He seemed a good fellow. What brought him to such a pass?"

I was silent.

"His sensuality," my foster-brother answered slowly. "That and nothing else. The octopus of sins that sucks the blood from the brain and the heart and the soul."

He covered his face with his hands, and I guessed what thoughts were streaming through his mind. He was standing in the presence of the God of Wrath.

The Yaqui looked impatiently at me.

"Courtenay," said I softly; "come, we must think of the living, not of the dead."

"God forgive me," he exclaimed. "What a selfish beast I have been!"

The Yaqui said that the lives and honour of the captives would be protected till the Notontos reached their own tribe. On what would then take place he maintained silence. As we were mounting our horses Quijas and the others rode up. Before separating we had agreed to fire a couple of shots as soon as the trail was picked up.

We then held a council of war.

The lieutenant, who had served in some of Vallejo's campaigns on the *frontera del norte*, and the Yaqui, were the only ones present who knew something of the lay of the country. By the latter's advice we essayed a short cut by which we should arrive the quicker at a divide in the mountains across which the Indians must needs pass. You must picture to yourself a wild and rugged country, gashed with gulches and cañons, divided into immense water-sheds, heavily timbered, and excellently watered. The Indians love the creeks, and are loth to leave them, living as they do upon game, fish, and such roots as grow for the most part in moist lands. The Yaqui said they would surely follow the creek upon which they had camped till they came to its source, then, crossing a divide, they would strike another stream which emptied itself into the San Joaquin river. Down this also they would travel till they came to the valley. The creek we were on wound in and out of the foothills, and the Yaqui proposed that we should keep on the crests of these hills, good galloping ground; whereas, in the creek bottoms there was much tangled undergrowth, through which even the Indios would be constrained to move at a snail's pace.

However, of that day's travel I can remember little save the intolerable fatigue and pain of it. I had started from Castañeda's adobe battered and bruised, more fit to be abed than astride a horse, and the harder I rode the softer I seemed to grow, till my body was as it were a bag of aching pulp, so invertebrate and wretched was my condition. My companions eyed me with a dismay they could not disguise, and afterwards Courtenay told

me that he was hourly expecting to see me fall from my horse. The old Don, too, looked ghastly, cadaverous, for he was well on in years and the victim of more than one disorder. I suppose I became delirious, for I began to hear mysterious sounds; the murmur of the leaves, the sighing of the pines, the babble of the brooks became articulate, speaking a tongue that my fancy could interpret; and this voice from the woods whispered of rest, rest, a syren's lullaby wooing me to a sleep that I dimly apprehended would have no waking.

But in every young man there are, thank Heaven, reserves of strength only obedient to the voice of necessity. For when we reached the divide of which I have spoken, and when Quijas came to me and said exultantly that we had outstripped the enemy—when I learned this blessed news, I say, my pains fell from me, and I became myself again. A trout stream gurgled and bubbled below the hog-back on which we stood, and Quijas bade me bathe in it, which I and Courtenay did without further urging, sloughing our grime and emerging, like Naaman, cleansed of mental and physical ills. Then the lieutenant, cunning in the art of ambuscades, submitted a plan of attack.

He proposed to leave our horses and take to the bed of the creek (where running water would leave no tracks), following the stream till we came to a place suitable for an ambush. He sent the Yaqui ahead at a dog-trot—a pace these fellows can keep up all day—and we followed less nimbly, although aglow with the ardour of battle. In this fashion we must have splashed along for nearly an hour, sometimes ankle-, sometimes knee-deep in the

water, for 'twas the lieutenant's notion (and a good one) to let the enemy's advance guard slip by us if it were possible, thereby splitting up and weakening their force. The Yaqui would give us timely warning of the approach of the scouts, then we would crouch in the shelter of the willows, and, when they had passed, charge boldly on the centre. This plan, none the less, came to naught, for suddenly the Yaqui came hurrying back with tidings that a rancheria lay below us on the right bank of the creek, that our Notontos were encamped there, and, lastly, that some ceremony—a dance, he thought—was about to take place.

"This is the tribe," said the lieutenant, "that has been ravaging the fat ranches of Santa Clara. I knew they had a rancheria somewhere in these mountains."

Procopio was of opinion that the affair had been pre-arranged. He knew that Castañeda's Indians had chafed beneath his cruelty and tyranny, that they were eager to rejoin their own tribe, and only awaiting an opportunity to do so. We agreed that the situation had become more serious. Fight now we must, but the questions "how" and "when" were not so easily determined. Courtenay, remembering school fights, urged that the first blow be struck by us; one to amaze and terrify by its unexpectedness. Quijas wondered what function was engaging the attention of braves just returned from the warpath. He had studied the customs of these tribes, and hoped to turn that knowledge to account. After a successful foray these red-skinned caterans, as a rule, crown their misdeeds with a disgusting orgy; a Saturnalia. To this day licentious festivals are common with the Indians of Arizona and

New Mexico, and breed now, as then, trouble between the white and red races.

Finally, we concluded to crawl as close as possible to the village, and then, at a given signal from the lieutenant, charge. The Yaqui was positive that every fighting man would take part in the dance, and our chief danger lay in the meeting of some squaw or child. Even this chance was slim, for the women and children seldom stray far from the tepees when a function is tickling their curiosity.

It was pitch dark when we left the stream. Procopio led us to a knoll just above the plateau whereon the rancheria was situated. Of course we could see nothing, but I describe the place as I saw it on the following morning. The tepees, or lodges, were merely willow poles driven into the ground and covered with brush and clay. We discovered, later, that this village had been ravaged by the small-pox, so the size of it was out of proportion to the population. Well, we waited impatiently till the moon rose, seemingly the time set by the Indians for the opening exercises, for we heard many shouts, and saw that a large bonfire had been built in the centre of the rancheria. Quijas said that a fire-dance was about to begin, and he added that the moon plays an important part in Indian mythology. Meantime, creeping nearer, we noted that a crowd had gathered around the pyre. The children were nude, and the men almost so, but the women wore aprons of grasses. However, at this particular time we saw nothing save the huge pile of brush, the pyramidal tepees, and the dark forms of the Indians silhouetted against the silvery radiance of the moon-lit ground.

Presently a procession formed, and the men began to circle round the pyre, chanting some peculiar epistrophe, for after each clause that seemingly contained a question the women would answer in a low mournful wail.

"That is there mode of worship," whispered Quijas.

Then the character of the ceremony changed, and the crowd formed itself into two lines, while an expectant hush fell upon all. It is hardly necessary to add that each of us had strained his eyes, hoping to catch a glimpse of the captives, but so far we had seen none but Indians. We were also burning to attack; the enemy outnumbered us by ten to one; yet we knew that only a few of them were armed with modern weapons. The lieutenant, however, refused flatly to give the word "charge," for he said that in half-an-hour opportunity would be riper.

The moon was now at an angle that enabled us to see more clearly, and suddenly out of the shadows of the tepees came Letty and Magdalena. Letty walked first, Magdalena followed, but 'twas plain that the interest of the Indians was focussed on my cousin

"Merciful Heaven!" ejaculated Courtenay, "are they going to burn them?"

Quijas assured me that women captives were never so treated.

"*Por Dios*," whispered Quijas. "They think she is the moon-maiden."

He came near to making a bull's-eye, for there had been a superstition in many Californian tribes that one day a lovely moon-maiden would rule over them, and teach her children magic arts and sciences. Later, we

learned that a greater honour had been vouchsafed my white-skinned cousin. The Notontos had confounded her with the Virgin Mary, believing that our Lady had become again incarnate. To those who had been baptized—and all of Castañeda's men were once neophytes of the missions—the Mother of God was little more than a beautiful woman with blue eyes, golden hair, and milk-white skin. And, further, it seems that Castañeda had encouraged this belief on the part of his serfs. No doubt it tickled his cynicism to see the feelings so lovely a creature would be certain to inspire turned by the breath of superstition into holy and adoring passion. And, curiously enough, this led to the Mexican's fearful end, for the Indians, noting the horror and disgust with which this divine lady regarded their tyrant, assured themselves that in killing him they were pleasing themselves and also the God to whom they had prayed as children.

Meantime, Letty had withdrawn to the right of the pyre accompanied by Magdalena and some squaws. The lines of men and women then dissolved; the pyre was fired; the braves kindled torches: and the fire-dance began. As they danced they sang, while the children imitated the cries of animals. The yapping of coyotes was very perfectly rendered, and I remembered that the souls of Indians are constrained to dwell for a season in the bodies of these wild curs. At that very moment Procopio nudged me, and whispered that he had seen his little grandfather in the skin of a coyote only two days before, and that, doubtless, he (the little grandfather) was present and enjoying the proceedings.

We waited patiently till the excitement was at its

height, then the lieutenant bade us prepare to attack. My lips twitched into a smile as I marked a joyous gleam in the eyes of the padre. By his oath a friar may shed no blood save in such cases as these. But now the soldier skipped out of his habit, as a snake sloughs its dingy skin, and he loosened his knife in its sheath with the air of an old campaigner. The soldiers had carbines and pistols; Procopio, Courtenay, and I carried rifles; but Jaynes drew his cutlass, with a grim grin upon his broad face, while the Don laid a lean thumb on the edge of his puñal. It was understood that we should charge, reserving our fire, for they might scatter like sheep before a grizzly; and, accordingly, racing down the slope we were well into the heart of the crowd before they were aware of our presence. Like the famous field of San Buenaventura, it had proved a bloodless victory had not Castañeda's Indians stood their ground. These poor fellows, believing that in any case death would be their portion, fought like Dervishes, and the others, taking heart when they saw how few we were, snatched up what weapons they could find and attacked us venomously in the rear. Courtenay was beside me cutting and slashing a path to his wife. Suddenly, I saw a flaming torch thrust into his face, and then, above the screaming of the squaws and the yells of our soldiers, I could hear his agonised cry: "I am blind, blind." He reeled back, and I caught him in my arms.

"Lie here," I whispered. "I will come to you as soon as I can."

"John," he replied, in a strange, awe-stricken voice. "Did I not tell you that I should never see her sweet face again?"

As he spoke I was attacked by the same man, and with the same weapon: a blazing brand. Fortunately, old Mark saw the miscreant's purpose and cut him down. Then, in the crash and confusion of the *mêlée*, I was torn from Courtenay and had to fight desperately for my own hand.

After five minutes of hot work the Indians broke and ran, as if a panic had struck every man at once. Some made for the tepees, others scurried away into the hills. Now, by the light of the still blazing bonfire I could see Letty and Magdalena. They were standing together; their arms interlaced. I ran towards them, but at the same moment two of Castañeda's fellows approached from the other side of the pyre. As the glow of the flames fell full upon their faces I could read their purpose. They had returned to slay the false goddess who in their opinion was responsible for these woes.

"Letty," I shrieked, in English, "run, run."

She obeyed, having learnt as a child the value of swift, unquestioning compliance with authority. But to my horror Magdalena stood where she was. Why, why? Did she think in that supreme moment that I had forgotten her, because I called first to Letty? Who knows? Was the anguish in my voice proof final that I loved my cousin better than her? Did she realise that by staying where she was Letty's safety was assured, for the Indians were very near, and would doubtless have overtaken both of them before I could interfere? These questions have tormented me ever since. I called to her—in vain. The little grey figure, lonely and forlorn, calmly awaited certain death. And my heart tells me that as it had been with us in the beginning, so it was

in the end. I had never understood this daughter of another race, of another day, and she, alas! had never understood me. I feel assured that she sacrificed her life for a rival, because she believed that I—I willed it.

You understand that all of this took place in less than a minute, although the memory of it has festered for fifty years. Never, during that weary time, have I been able to speak of what I saw, not even to my mother. Can that man give sorrow words who has seen happiness murdered before his eyes; who has watched life and love escaping upon the wings of a blunder? Here was I, a strong man, constrained to witness the shipwreck of hope; powerless to save, unable to speak—the wretched creature and victim of a misunderstanding. Can such a one survey his loss calmly, critically? Would that I could. In after years, when Courtenay was master of the Abbey, honoured, and respected, and loved; when he told me, as he often did, that the loss of his sight (which had plunged him at first into direst despair) had proved indeed a gain—for by the grace of Heaven what was good in him ripened in adversity—when Letty, fond wife and mother, would take my hand in hers and whisper to me that God in His wisdom knows what is best for His creatures; when, in fine, in the evening of a life that men counted successful (the lands at Branciforte made me rich), I was sensible of the peace and rest that crown labour and sorrow—at such times as these, I submit, I did dimly apprehend that my little maid was but ill-equipped for the struggles and disappointments of life to-day. She was of Arcadia, the child of Nature—a flower that blooms only in a land of sunshine, that wilts before the storm.

The man who stabbed her received the butt-end of my rifle on his skull, but the other, before I could recover, had driven his puñal into the fleshy part of my left shoulder, and the force of the blow brought me to my knees. As the fellow bent over me to withdraw his knife, I caught him by the ankle and flung him over my hip. But he fell like a cat, and running in clasped me around the waist. As we swayed back and forth, my ribs seemed to be breaking with the pressure, but he dared not shift his hold, while I was impotent. Now in wrestling, as you know, the art lies in using not only your own strength but the strength of your adversary. Accordingly, as this redskin hugged me to his sinewy chest, I threw all my weight and strength in the same direction, so that we came to the ground with a crash that loosened his hold. Before he could recover—I being atop of him—I had clapped on him a half-Nelson, and so had him at my mercy. Just then the one I had stunned crawled up from the side and stabbed me in the right pectoral. Although giddy from loss of blood I was able to despatch both of them, at the end falling across their bodies—to all intent as dead as they.

When my wits came back to me, Quijas was bandaging my wound. Letty, it seemed, had run screaming to him, and, doubtless, his prompt help saved my life. He had fought like a paladin; now, once again, he was physician and priest.

“Magdalena?” I gasped.

It seemed an eternity before he replied. Then he said very gently: “My son, she is dead.”

I am glad that he told me the truth in plain words. These friars are trained to leave many things unsaid.

Had Quijas soiled the silence that followed with those trite, sorry phrases which rise so glibly to the lips of the Chadbands of the Church, it would have been in my heart to smite him on the mouth.

She was dead.

I closed my eyes, and the past flitted before me; those phantoms of what had been, those gibbering wraiths of what might have been. And my own ambitions, so mean and petty now, clamoured like furies, calling me fool and dolt. O! my love, my little love! Are you waiting for me on the shore to whose lee I am drifting? At the last, as the shadows close around me, shall I see your faithful eyes? Shall I hear your tender voice? Shall I feel your arms about me, your lips about mine?

Ah! who knows?

FINIS



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